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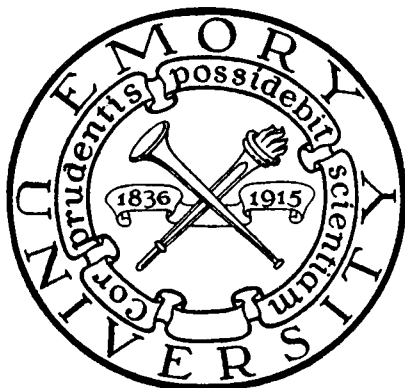
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MEN OF CAPITAL.

BY

MRS. GORE,

AUTHORESS OF

“THE BANKER’S WIFE,” “PEERS AND PARVENUS,” ETC.

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PREFACE.

FEW will deny that the age we live in is the age of Money-worship ; or that foremost among the votaries of Mammon are our own country-people. In Great Britain, however vehement the disputes between High Church and Low, the Molten Calf remains the predominant idol.

That this passion for gold constitutes a fertile source of national greatness, is equally indisputable. But for our appetite for enrichment, our colonies had never been founded, our foreign enterprises never attempted. Mephitic climates had not been braved or perilous seas navigated, in order to extract from more favoured soils the precious products denied to our northern clime. If content, like the indolent Italians, with the enjoyment of unsophisticated nature, or absorbed, like the cloud-skimming Germans, in intellectual speculations, India had not been conquered or Australia civilized ; whereas, the lust of gold, which defies the fevers of Sierra Leone and the knives of the Bush Rangers, has placed the island, of such small account

in the Commentaries *Cæsar* writ,

foremost in the rank of European powers.

But the passions advantageous to a nation may be injurious to an individual. Ambition and Money-love, if they tend to ennoble a country, reduce to insignificance the human particles of which the nation is composed. In their pursuit of riches, the English are gradually losing sight of higher characteristics. In every political contest, whether for the maintenance of parliamentary influence in the shape of rotten boroughs, or of high rent under the name of the Corn Laws, the claws of Avarice become frightfully apparent. Our pursuit of railway bubbles, and every other frantic speculation of the hour, affords sufficient evidence of the craving after capital superseding every better aspiration, whether for this world or the next.

The very sound of a sum in millions tickles the ear of an Englishman ! He loves it so much, indeed, that it all but reconciles him to the National Debt ; and, when applied to private proprietorship, it secures deference for lowness of mind, birth, habits, and pursuits. No man so rich, but endeavours to become richer : the fine gentleman, by gambling on the turf or the hazard-table ; the country gentleman, by theoretical farming ; the man of business, by speculation.

All that part of the population which is not occupied in toiling for its bread, consecrates its time and intellects to the alchemic enterprise of converting silver into gold.

One of the chief causes which render this pursuit a bitterer as well as more pardonable struggle in England than on the Continent, is the unequal and capricious distribution of family property. The abolition, by the Code Napoleon, of the law of primogeniture, was one of the most effective aids ever afforded towards the greatest happiness of the greatest number;—the foreign countries where this reform prevails being secure against the demoralizing spectacle of the younger sons of the nobility, reared in the enjoyment of luxury, and turned adrift, on attaining man's estate, to gratify, at the cost of other people, the factitious appetites they have acquired; for no species of honest industry enables a poor honourable to supply himself with a tithe part of the comforts which, so long as he abided under his father's roof, it would have been a reproach to him had he failed to enjoy.

But it is not alone the creation of *majorats* for the maintenance of the Order which, in its turn, confers benefits on the country, that tends to produce a class of strugglers after enrichment to maintain themselves on a level with their caste. Country gentlemen and professional men,—nay, men without the pretension of being gentlemen,—are scarcely less smitten with the mania of creating “an eldest son,” to the exclusion and degradation of their younger children; and by the individuals thus defrauded by their nearest and dearest, is the idolatry of Mammon pursued with least regard to self-respect or the rights of their fellow-creatures. Injured, they injure in their turn. Their days are devoted to a campaign for the recovery of their birthright. Interested marriages, shabby bargains, and political jobbery, may often be traced to the vile system of things which converts the elder son into a Dives, and makes a Lazarus of his brother.

The first of the two following stories is related nearly in the terms in which it was told me by one of the actors in a drama sadly illustrative of the evil influence of mercenary motives. But, lest the title should appear to elevate a mere narrative of facts into the exemplification of an exclusive principle, a second tale is subjoined, exhibiting the Man of Capital in his nobler phases, as well as the difficulties arrayed against his progress in his seemingly velvet career.

The inhabitants of a metropolis like London, where speculators occasionally ascend by a single stride from the counter to the gorgeous palace of Aladdin, may deny the truth of the picture. But more than one country neighbourhood will have to confess that little exaggeration has been used in delineating the opposition of its ancient county families to the intrusion and wholesome innovations of a MAN OF CAPITAL.

THE MAN OF CAPITAL.

CHAPTER I.

L'amitié vient sans qu'on y songe. Elle se forme insensiblement, et s'affirme avec les années : et les vrais amis le sont longtemps, avant de s'aviser d'en prendre le nom.—ROUSSEAU.

If it were solely of my own adventures I had to tell, not even the flattering proposition I have received would induce me to throw myself personally on the compassion of the reader. But the history of another is closely interwoven with my own ; the history of one whom, at various epochs of his life, the world has been pleased to love and honour ; first, as a capital fellow, and lastly, as a man of capital.

It was at Eton I first became acquainted with Barty Brooks.

"My name is Bartholomew," said he, in answer to my inquiry. "But it puts people in mind of Smithfield, a fair, and an hospital ; while 'Barty' sounds so like 'Bertie,' that I pass for a relation of Lord Abingdon's, and come off all the better with the Dons."

By this it will be seen that Barty had already an eye to his interests. He was, in fact, compelled to have a care of them ; being, like myself, a younger brother, and an orphan. He had become one, indeed, so shortly after his birth, that his notions of family affection were as imaginative as those of an Andover-Union pauper of a sirloin of beef. During his preparatory school-days, he had indulged in a vague notion that some boys were born of parents and some of guardians—like the Hindoo castes, emitted by the head or feet of Bramah ; or, rather, that guardian was the name expressive in the English language of a bad father, as the French word *marâtre* of a savage stepmother, instead of describing *his* by the touching phrase in which the painter Raphael used to address his guardian, "*Carissimo quanto padre*," he was never known to call him otherwise than "the old hunks."

By degrees he learned to modify the appellation ; for he saw that, in the case of his elder brother, Sir Robert Brookes, only a year older than himself and subjected to the same guardianship, there was reason to invest the office with all the tenderness of

paternity. Any one might see that Sir Robert succeeded to an entailed estate of five thousand per annum, and Barty to exactly the amount of his yearly income.

There were three children of them. They had a sister, who, being brought up in Suffolk by a maiden aunt, remained an invisible girl to her brothers. But as little Harriet's portion was no larger than Barty's, she probably shared his opinion, that Justinian Broadham, Esq., M.P., of Lombard-street and East Wandsworth, belonged to the *rugosus* or *spinosissimus* species of the genus Guardian.

The parents of these children had died before the elder of the three was four years old, within a few months of each other; some said, of a pulmonary complaint; others, of the overjoy of succeeding to the fine property of Wrenhurst Park, by the sudden death of a bachelor uncle, in the prime of life and matrimonial intentions. But the untimely death of Barty's father, soon after his accession of fortune, had rendered it impossible to increase the portions of his younger children, consisting of five thousand pounds apiece—the third of a splendid fortune on which a young man possessed of ten, and a girl possessed of five, had been rash enough to marry, and become founders of a family.

The grandfather of my friend Barty, an opulent Yorkshire grazier, had worked his way upwards in the world, and converted his hundreds into hundreds of thousands, and his paddocks into a park; while his uncle, the second of the dynasty, had converted certain of his thousands into a baronetcy, at that epoch of the reign of George III., when half the worthies of the parish of Marylebone used to go to bed John Thompson, and rise Sir John. The little Sir Robert Brookes, of Wrenhurst Park, who was conveyed to Eton in the handsome post-chariot of his guardian, was consequently entitled to the utmost protection of Dr. Keate, as a Bar. of three descents, in the enjoyment of a fine landed property; and people were as little likely to trouble themselves about his origin, as to inquire whether he had a younger brother.

A year afterwards, Barty himself was forwarded, by the Clewer coach, to the same destination. Had any human being besides his old nurse felt interested in his destinies, the proposition would probably have been mooted, whether the school that was good for a lad with five thousand per annum, was not *too* good for a lad with scarcely the half of five hundred. But no questions were asked. Old Broadham satisfied his conscience with muttering something about "the advantages of connection to a youth who has his way to push in the world;" a specious interpretation of the fact that it was less trouble to have the boys at the same school; and that the same "fetching for the holidays" served for both. He had never exactly understood why his friendship with Sir

Robert the first, whose Yorkshire connection was the means of establishing his constituency in Lombard-street, should have put it into the head of Barty's father to burden him with the guardianship of his young family; for though in ancient Rome the birth of three children entitled a man, by virtue of the *jus trium liberorum*, to certain enfranchisements, the banker did not see why, in modern Wandsworth, the privilege was to be renewed. And if he accepted a trust, of which every possible cost was to be defrayed out of the estate, it was chiefly lest the large Yorkshire and Lincolnshire constituency, for which he was indebted to the Brookeses, should take his refusal amiss.

Both were good-looking lads. But Barty, who had roughed his way through the hard fare and hard work of a Yorkshire school, while Sir Robert was kept in silken leading strings at an Academy near town, had already learned that a man must square his elbows who has to push his way through the crowd; while his elder understood the wisdom of standing still, that his way might be pushed for him. With his schoolfellows, the active brother was of course the more popular. But Sir Robert had still the best of it at Wandsworth.

Among the many arguments by which old Broadham justified to himself the education he was giving to a lad so slenderly provided for as Barty, was, that Sir Robert, on attaining his majority, would doubtless execute for his younger brother the vague duty of rich relationship—"doing something." The young baronet, on succeeding to an unencumbered estate, enriched by the savings of his minority, must "do something" for Barty. Even to himself, the banker did not particularise what the "something" was to be: whether another five thousand tacked to his patrimony, or the purchase-money of a living or commission. But, among three children so unequally portioned, the elder has to play the part of a father towards the other two.

Old Broadham probably conceived that Barty himself entertained similar expectations; so contented or rather so joyous was the temper with which he confronted the troubles of life. Barty Brookes was imperturbable; Barty Brookes was insubmergeable. He had not been six months at Eton before he was one of the most popular fellows in the school. Like other younger sons who have only their skins to be careful of, *his* was risked without a thought. Were I to recount the personal feats of my friend Barty, the credulous age we live in, which swallows the wildfire anecdotes of an American newspaper, would laugh me to scorn. Even his chums admitted him to be a perfect dare-devil. "The thing is," said Barty, when challenged concerning his exploits, "I'm obliged to break bounds, ride, shoot, climb, swim and row, for *two*! Bob is such a deuce of a spoony, and takes such confounded care of him-

self, that, for the honour of the family, I am forced to run constant risk of expulsion." No one but his brother ever dreamed of abbreviating Sir Robert into "Bob." His toes were as square as if he had been born as well as bred in Lombard-street. He was an exemplary young gentleman, the pride of Keate, and idol of his dame; who took back to Wandsworth, at the close of his half, two-thirds of the pocket-money he had brought with him to Eton.

The translation of the proprietor of Wrenhurst from Eton to Oxford, was the moment that brought the relative position of the two boys to a crisis. Old Broadham, judging that, at sixteen and seventeen, they were old enough to listen to his first speech from the throne, apprised them that their roads must henceforward lie apart; since "Bartholomew," (he did not abate a single syllable of the four,) was not sufficiently well off to enjoy the advantages of a university education. But, if he had calculated on the probability that the "something" to be done by the young baronet would now demonstrate itself, in the shape of a request that Barty might accompany him to Christ Church *quand même*, and at his cost, he was thoroughly mistaken. Sir Robert was delighted to get rid of the only one of his young companions who took the liberty of calling him Bob; and as to Barty, after throwing up his hat for joy at the notion of his education being over three years before that of his brother, and listening with an air of wonder to the old banker's impudent promise to exert his interest to obtain him a clerkship in some substantial house of business, he announced his intention of entering the Guards.

"The *Guards*?—the Guards, with an income of two hundred and ten pounds a-year? Where would the money come from, for the purchase of his commission? and to what did the imprudent young man expect to work his way?"

"Let the future take care of itself!" cried the foolish boy in reply. "As to the commission, my godfather, Sir Willoughby Marsden, has already obtained the promise of one from the Horse Guards."

This intimation of a secret understanding and correspondence between Barty and his godfather, (an old general officer high in favour with the royal family, and high in fashion at the Cocoa Tree,) completed the antipathy of the city man towards his thoughtless ward. Hitherto he had despised him as a wretched younger son. He now began to abhor him as a wretched younger son who had found friends. Even Sir Robert, on discovering that Barty had a protector, regarded him as less his brother.

"The time will come, young gentleman," said the banker, "when you will understand the advantage it would have been to you to enter life as the protégé of a man of capital rather than of a man of fashion. In the city my recommendation would have

gone for something. But since you prefer tinsel to gold, so be it. A red coat has its charm, I presume, even though likely to be threadbare. But one thing, Mr. Brookes, I beg you to understand; that, incur what debts or difficulties you may, not a shilling beyond the two hundred and ten pounds thirteen shillings and eightpence per annum to which you are legitimately entitled will you receive at my hands, till the attainment of your majority. Your brother may hereafter do something for you, if he thinks proper. But, till he is of age, his allowance of six hundred per annum—"

He paused, having suddenly discovered that Sir Robert was his only auditor! At the height of his discourse, Barty had profited by the open window near which he was standing, to drop down upon the velvet lawn of old Broadham's villa; and leave the lecture for the enjoyment of the elder brother, who monopolised so many of the good things of the family.

CHAPTER II.

Every guise of fortune
Is smoothed by that below. The learned pate
Ducks to the golden fool. All is oblique.
There's nothing level in our cursed natures
But direct villany.—SHAKESPEARE.

It was not alone to get rid of his prosy guardian that Barty had bolted. He had caught sight at the extremity of the shrubbery of Emma's white gown, or rather white frock, for she was little more than a child. Child as she was, however, Emmy was the only thing that made the Broadhams' formal establishment supportable to Barty; the old banker being as stiff as the clay of Wrenhurst, or as a German court. His grandfather was a quaker, his father a wet quaker; and though Justinian had taken refuge in the bosom of the Mother Church, it was only that she might roll him on castors into parliament. To his constituents, Broadham was a high churchman. He was still a quaker at heart. In his Wandsworth home, all was tame, cold, and colourless—the clockwork routine of a life without passions or predilections. A hearty laugh had never been heard in the house. A great joy was it to Barty when he could get a rise out of his guardian by a crash of china or furniture, or an inbreak into the patent steam grapery he loved.

"Think how obliged the old soul ought to be to me," said he, in describing the extreme measures to which he was obliged to have recourse, "for quickening the circulation of his blood!"

But from the moment Emmy made her appearance in the

house, Barty had mercy on the arm-chairs and dessert plates. One day, in a sudden fit of enthusiasm or qualm of conscience, Mrs. Broadham was pleased to adopt one of the twelve fatherless children of a poor relation. But though her only son was married and settled, no sooner had poor Emmy become her inmate, than she repented her false start of generosity; and, but that she contrived to make the girl useful in winding worsted, writing notes, and supporting the ill-humours of a rainy day, would perhaps have found some pretext for wrangling out of her bargain.

For the present, however, Emmy retained possession of her unenviable post, and Barty's last two holidays from Eton were cheered by the companionship of a fellow-sufferer under Broadham persecution. Denied the society of his sister, Barty rejoiced at having found a friend; and the first flood of tears ever seen to proceed from the blue eyes of Emmy was on learning that her playmate was about to enter the army.

"You will never set foot in this dreary house again, when once you are in the Guards," said she. "Who *would* that could help it!—I shall have no one now to keep me company but your brother; and I would as soon walk in the shrubberies with Mr. Broadham himself, as Sir Robert!"

"Don't be afraid, darling Emmy!" cried her young Romeo. "So long as you remain with the Broadhams, I will never desert the house. Much as I detest it and all its ways, I shall often ride down to Wandsworth, to see what you are about."

But Emmy's tears flowed only more freely at the thoughts that he who was to ride down, must also ride back again, and leave her more cheerless than before! For nearly a day after Barty took his last leave of his guardian's establishment, to join the battalion of Guards into which he had been gazetted some weeks before, the poor girl was inconsolable.

On joining his regiment, meanwhile, Barty was not long in discovering that the patronage of his red-nosed old godfather was to be limited to the commission he had obtained for him. But Sir Willoughby, who was a thorough man of the world, if he gave him nothing else, was no niggard of his advice. "You have got into the Guards in haste, Mr. Brookes," said he, "and will mayhap repent at leisure. Better have stuck to the city. Better have stuck to the banking connection in which you have been brought up. Nothing to be done in the army, as times go! No getting on without interest—no getting on without money; and you have neither one nor t'other! Even those who are backed, like myself, by family influence, find themselves laid on the shelf at last, with a pension incomparably less than the wages of a French cook. If I had life to begin again, I would almost as soon be a scavenger as a soldier!"

And though Barty laughed in his sleeve at this pithy oration, the facts of the case forced themselves on his recognition much sooner than he could have desired. Sir Willoughby was right. He was *not* rich enough for the Guards. He saw his brother officers in the enjoyment of a thousand pleasures which to *him* were forbidden fruit. Where was the use of London, if all its enjoyments were out of reach? It was perhaps the habit of revolving this wisdom in his mind, that left him no leisure for the accomplishment of his promises to his old playmate. Had Wandsworth been in Yorkshire, he could hardly have found it more difficult to reach. Or was it that the preaching of Sir Willoughby had enlightened his mind to the danger of so intimate a friendship with one still more penniless than himself?

One dreary Sunday evening, however, towards the end of August, when the better half of his brother officers were off to the moors, the opera being closed, and the very sun, like an old plated candlestick, beginning to show copper in place of its customary brightness, the parched dreariness of the empty park recalled to mind the grassy freshness of old Broadham's lawn—that fine soft turf produced by a century of mowing; and lo! his desponding mood gave way in a moment at the thought of Wandsworth and its Hamadryad—that darling Emmy, with whom he had so often traversed that short green herbage—race running in the early spring, or in the dusk of a summer's evening, their arms interlaced, their hearts nearly as closely entwined. His heart was full, when he thought of all this; all the fuller, perhaps, because his pockets were empty; a combination singularly favourable to the development of pathetic sentiment. "I will ride down to Wandsworth, damme if I don't!" murmured he, at the close of his reverie; adding, in a lower voice, as if in palliation of his rashness, "for there is not a soul left in town, and I may as well keep up my connection with the Broadhams."

As he approached the villa, Barty prepared his courage for reproaches. The old people were probably indignant at his neglect. The young one, alas! what could he possibly say in excuse for himself to Emmy! No occasion for a single word! Mrs. Broadham received him with her usual placid indifference; and as to Emmy, she was grown nearly as frigid and reserved as the rest of the family. The romping girl was already transmuted into a grave young woman. While surveying her inexpressive face and perpendicular person, Barty could scarcely bring himself to believe that, but a few weeks before, they had run races together in the twilight. So far from grieving after his absence, she evidently regretted that he had not continued to stay away; and no sooner had the indignant Barty made the discovery, than he hastened to accept the invitation of the Broadhams to dine, and ride back to

town in the cool of the evening. Since she wanted him gone, he would remain.

It was the custom of the enfranchised man of business to devote his Sabbath leisure to carnal pleasures. As sure as Sunday came, half the Stock Exchange was seated round his dinner-table:—city chums, pious worshippers like himself of the molten calf, and, like himself, as expert as Birch or Grove in deciding on the richness of the turbot or ripeness of the haunch. Well did Barty remember how he used to watch with loathing the greedy tremulousness of lip with which these sensualists gloated over their repast! But he now noted it with fifty-fold greater abhorrence. Not alone, because, in the interim, he had sat at good men's feasts, and perceived how much the intellectual predominated over the physical, in the pleasant chat and sparkling wit of the best dinner-tables of London; but because convinced that, among those ponderous mortals whose capacities were absorbed in the pursuit of gain, lay the charm which had operated so strange a revolution in the nature of Emmy. They were chiefly single men. For it is only bachelor guests who are at the disposal of Sunday dinners; and, disgusting as he had found aforetime the obesity of the prize-ox Russia merchant from Great St. Helen's; the squinting stock-broker from Birchin Lane, attired in the resplendent fashions of Moses and Co.; and the spare banker from the Poultry, whose face was puckered into the thousand wrinkles of a collapsed India-rubber ball; never had he found them, severally and collectively, so repellent as with the conviction that the Broadhams had influenced their poor dependant to select among these men of millions a home more permanent than she derived from their grudging benevolence. The same philosophy expounded to himself by Sir Willoughby Marsden had probably made a convert of Emmy. His approval or disapproval was a matter of complete indifference to the whole party. In their opinion, antipathies or predilections were luxuries as much beyond the reach of so small a capitalist, as turtle and venison; and like them, only to be enjoyed at the cost of other people. When, therefore, the young guardsman endeavoured to speak daggers to the city by a pungent allusion to the money-changers in the Temple, they treated his impertinence with the disregard they would have shown to the buzzing of a gnat; and pursued among themselves the discussion of their bargains of the preceding week.

Justinian Broadham was their main link with the legislature of the country; and, as it happened that the Sunday in question was the one immediately following the prorogation of parliament, a variety of explanations and projects were discussed between them, of such vital importance to the interests of national commerce, that even the self-complacent Barty was forced to feel that an

ensign of his majesty's foot-guards is but a Lilliputian fraction of the empire of Great Britain. The sense of his insignificance did not, however, put him in better conceit with these tame elephants, these moneyed men, most of them as yellow as if the gold they loved were flowing molten in their veins. But he ceased to wonder that contact with such a weight of metal had deadened the spirits of his pretty little Emmy. A few more such Sundays, and he should himself be qualified to represent a metropolitan district. The prospect, perhaps, was not displeasing, or curiosity had the best of it, or his heart still remained full, and his pockets empty; for he found nothing better to do than return Sunday after Sunday to the villa. Amazing the quantity of venison and turtle, bulls and bears, scrip and omnium, which he contrived to swallow. And still, without attaining a surmise *which* of the eight or ten humpish, hazy old fellows who constituted the Broadham coterie, had proved the means of converting the wilful, wayward Emmy into a Mrs. Margery Meanwell! He dwelt indeed so curiously upon the question, that he was as near as possible striking the balance between a pair of arch blue eyes and his future prospects in life. But, luckily for my friend Barty, just as he was on the point of renouncing the charms of pounds, shillings, and pence for himself and his heirs for ever, London began to fill again. The theatres opened, the gas-lights blazed, the clubs became slightly sprinkled, and, after the first Thames flood, the Wandsworth Road was again voted impassable. A flirtation is a pleasant thing, but not when it leads a man into a quagmire; and, as old Broadham, like Childe Waters in the ballad,

Was never so courteous a knight
As to say, my Barty, will you ride?

he remained high and dry in St. James's, leaving the miry ways of Wandsworth, and unaccountable ways of Emmy, to take care of themselves.

Once lost sight of, and by degrees dismissed from his thoughts, he was all the happier. It was about that time commenced my intimacy with Barty. We were in the same regiment. I was just then making a two years' income of my patrimony, for the creation of a momentary flash of fashion; and of those by whose applause and example I was stimulated, Barty Brookes was by far the most attractive. By example, I do not mean as regards prodigality; for he was not yet of age, and was much too well acquainted with the obstinacy of the ex-Quaker (which Broadham called steadiness to his word) to hazard the annoyances certain to arise from exceeding his income. The stiff old general, Sir Willoughby, moreover, in presenting him with his commission, had insisted too strongly on the ungentlemanliness of incurring liabilities beyond his means,

that after the first six months he managed his small income with the financial wisdom of a Chancellor of the Exchequer. Still, as the son and brother of a wealthy baronet, he passed for a young man of good fortune and good prospects. No one but myself in the regiment was aware of the real state of the case; and as every body is ready to give to those who want nothing, Barty, being so capital a horseman that every one was glad to mount him, became the crack rider with the buckhounds, and, by winning several steeple-chases, had more than once doubled the value of a horse; while, during the summer months, his high courage and nautical skill, and, above all, his companionableness and good humour, insured him six times as much yachting as was compatible with his regimental duties. Scarcely a fellow in his battalion who had shooting at his disposal, but shared it with Barty; and, on occasions of Richmond and Greenwich parties, the best place on the best drag was sure to be reserved for him. His jokes were successful, his songs encored. Never was there so capital a fellow as Barty Brookes!

From eighteen to twenty, what can a man want more than such a life? From eighteen to twenty, what man, leading such a life, is likely to look forward? Providence for the future, under such circumstances, would be like tucking an umbrella under one's arm for a walk in the dog days. Even when his brother's majority approached (the term previous to which Sir Robert was to quit Oxford after taking his degree), Barty troubled himself no further concerning the critical moment which was to enable his brother to "do" the "something" so often and so vaguely alluded to, than by congratulating himself that the lease for which the Wrenhurst property had been let, would then expire; and that, for the future, he should have excellent shooting of his own (was not his brother's his own?) to offer to his friends, in return for all he had been enjoying. Sir Robert was a grave, silent young man, a bit of a prig, and a bit of a spoony, who would leave all that sort of thing in his hands. Already, by anticipation, he felt how pleasant it would be to have a country house to which he could take down a friend, for a few days' sport; and I was probably not the only fellow of his set to whom he had already tendered the hospitalities of the house of his fathers. I hope I was the only one rash enough to provide himself in consequence with leather gaiters and a shooting-jacket!

One day—a hot summer's day it was—I was lying extended on the brown Holland sofa of my lodgings, vainly attempting to doze over the novel of O'Donnell, then in the first brilliancy of its favour, when, lo! in burst Barty, begging me to take his guard for him on the following day. It was not weather to be obliging, and I was brute enough to stand out.

"I wouldn't ask you again *so soon*, my dear fellow," cried he

(and let the word explain how often my good will towards him was imposed upon), "but I *must* have to-morrow to myself!"

"And so must I," was my languid answer, "for I shall be up till morning at the Argyll Rooms."

"Just for this once! I will take two for you in return!"

"Some coaching expedition to the Black Dog?"

"In that case, you would be of the party."

"A Greenwich dinner, then, with Chéri? Considering how the last ended, depend upon it I will not aid and abet you in such another scrape."

"You are quite out, my dear fellow!" persisted Barty. "This is another affair. I have got a formal invitation for dinner to-morrow at my guardian's; and as my brother is to be in town to-night, I conclude it is for a sort of family meeting; for it is more than a twelvemonth since old Broadham condescended to ask me into his house!"

"Why could you not tell me all this at first?" said I, exchanging my horizontal for the perpendicular, and entering more eagerly into his prospects than could have been expected in such weather, from even the best of friends. "Business before pleasure! Of course I will take your guard."

Before I was relieved from it, I had a visit from Barty in person, on his way home from Wandsworth to his lodgings. When he first entered the room, where both the atmosphere and my sight were somewhat troubled by the meerschaum I had been smoking, I fancied for a single second that old Broadham's Port, Madeira, and lime-punch, had been too much for brains accustomed to claret and champagne. A singular look about the eyes seemed to announce that Barty was *cut*. And so he was—to the soul! He was literally reeling under the shock he had received. The family-meeting had been called preparatory to Sir Robert's attainment of years of discretion, to announce to Barty not what he intended to "do for him," but what he was going to do for himself. His wedding day was to follow that of his coming of age!

"Going to be married?" cried I, who, in common with the rest of Barty's friends, had indulged in absurd dreams of his future inheritance of Wrenhurst. "Too young by half,—too young—too young!"

"Too old by half, for such a piece of tomfoolery as he is about to be guilty of!" rejoined my friend.

Apprehending by the exasperation of his manner that Sir Robert had been deluded into one of those wretched connections sometimes provoked at Oxford by the rawness of an undergraduate, I had not courage to question him further.

"When I arrived to-day at Hypocrisy Hall," said he (it was thus he always designated his guardian's villa), "I was convinced,

from the horribly demure faces of the whole party, that some monstrous treachery was brewing. I vow to Heaven, my dear Percy, that a Nabaub arriving by the last Indian fleet on the lookout for investments for his money, could not have been more warmly welcomed. Old Lombard-street inquired twice before we sat down to dinner whether I minded a draught; and helped me to an Alderman's share of the fin of the turbot and fat of the haunch! The Judas!" And poor Barty was literally obliged to pause and wipe away the moisture of agitation from his forehead.

"After dinner," continued he, with a gasp, "the moment his Simon-Pure-looking butler had quitted the room, the old sinner, looking round the table with a smirk of complacency I shall never forget, proposed a toast—the health of Sir Robert and Lady Brookes!"

"Married already?"

"You look almost as much amazed as I did! No! It was merely a delicate pleasantry of the kind that prevails at Wandsworth. But the future bride and bridegroom looked quite as overwhelmed as though the funeral service had already been read over them, and the drop fallen!"

"The bride?—you did not tell me the bride had been asked to meet you. And who then, after all, is to be the future Lady Bountiful of Wrenhurst Park?"

"*Who?* Cannot you guess, my dear fellow—cannot you guess? That confounded little jilt—Emmy!"

CHAPTER III.

Art sick?—art sad?—art angry with the world?
Do all friends fail thee? Why, then give thyself
Unto the forests and ambrosial fields:
Commerce with them and with the eternal sky.
Never despair!—PROCTOR.

It needed no great stress of argument on my part to convince poor Barty, that if he betrayed to the wedding-party the following day only half the emotion he was now exhibiting, his depression would be attributed to the most degrading motives. His brother knew nothing, and his guardian pretended to know nothing, of any previous rompings between him and the bride. The match had been long arranged. Mrs. Broadham's prudent suggestions to her dependent kinswoman touching her future establishment were further sighted than Barty had at first supposed; and at the very time my friend was so jealous of the fat Russian merchant and lean stock-broker, Emmy was his affianced sister-in-law. It could

scarcely be otherwise. The young baronet's vacations were spent under his guardian's roof; nor had he ever opened his lips to any other young lady than the blue-eyed and slender-waisted but exceedingly demure damsel, whose price, he was assured, was beyond rubies. However enraged, therefore, at finding himself thus cleverly jockeyed, Barty retained sufficient self-command to go through the part of bridesman with grace and spirit; and, as his young sister and her maiden aunt had been invited out of Suffolk to be present at the ceremony, he experienced some compensation in his introduction to Harriet, whom he saw almost for the first time, for the annoyances arising from the match.

I must say a word or two of Harriet, though I trust the attention of the reader is absorbed now by the vexations of Barty; for Miss Brookes was a girl of so gentle and retiring a nature, that few were qualified to speak of her as she deserved. Though but a year younger than Barty and myself, compared with us she was a child. Her existence had been of so secluded a nature, that she had scarcely voice to answer the commonest question, and trembled when looked at. A hard fate! for those who caught a single glimpse of her sweet face found it a difficult matter to look at anything else. Barty was enchanted with her. Judging of his family by his brother, it had never occurred to him that a sister could be anything so delightful. And though by the marriage of that day he lost his chance of the baronetcy and five thousand a-year, he rose next morning feeling himself richer than he had ever felt in his life. It is true that I, who had been invited to the wedding-breakfast to keep him in countenance, had never ceased congratulating him since the event, not upon having such a sister-in-law, but such a sister.

"And did old Broadham say nothing to you in the course of the day," I enquired (having noticed sundry whisperings pass between the wily guardian and his ward), "concerning what Sir Robert is to do for you?"

"Not a syllable."

"The announcement is probably deferred, then, till you come of age next year? Your brother, doubtless, means to provide for you, the estate being entailed, out of his savings!"

"Hardly," replied Barty, with a scornful smile. "For the private conversation you noticed between me and the old gentleman purported to intimate that, in order not to encumber with a dower the landed property of his ward, the accumulations of the minority were settled on Lady Brookes and her children."

"And you did not break out, even *then*?"

"To what purpose? The deed of settlement was signed, sealed, and delivered before I even heard of the match! And a pretty

match old Lombard-street has proved for me. Hang him ! In these days it is so seldom that a squaretoes like that obtains the advantage over one of *us* !”

“After all his unmeaning protestations, then, you conceive that Sir Robert has put it out of his power to make any addition to yours and Miss Brookes’s fortunes ?”

“Harriet wants nothing of him. A pretty girl marries as easily with five thousand pounds as ten. But I *do* mean that every guinea of his money is disposed of. Henceforward I know what I have got to trust to, and little enough it is.”

From that day, Barty, who had been hitherto so careless of his future prospects, became suddenly inoculated with interestedness. Contented as he had always been, now that his destinies were immutable, he found them insufficient for his happiness. The fortune to achieve which had sufficed to deteriorate the character of the candid Emmy, deteriorated also by its loss the character of poor Barty. As to Sir Robert’s “doing something” for him, when he came of age, he now knew better than to expect it. And experience confirmed his wisdom. The brothers never met, but the proprietor of Wrenhurst took occasion to bewail his poverty.

“It was such a trying thing—such a *very* trying thing—to live in a neighbourhood inhabited by families of thrice your income. Their neighbours at Wrenhurst were the Duke of Allonby, who was spending sixty thousand per annum ; Lord Spalding, with five-and-thirty ; and Sir Archibald Honer and Sir Thomas Walmisley, twenty thousand a-year a piece ! To live amongst such men on terms of gentlemanly equality, was a difficult matter for a man with a miserable five ! It would be a hard matter to make both ends meet. Though Emmy’s experience in so prudent a household as that of the Broadhams had naturally made her an excellent manager, he greatly feared that by the end of the year they should find Wrenhurst too great a pull upon their income.”

Poor Barty began almost to doubt whether it was not rather his duty to assign one of his two hundreds a-year to his brother, towards keeping up the family place, than claim anything at his hands ; nor would he have accepted succour of the overtaken baronet, even had it been offered. The worst of it was, that Barty’s sudden perception, not only of the value of money but of his own straitened prospects, began to operate on his temper, and render him a less agreeable companion. By the time a little heir was born to Wrenhurst, so thoroughly had his fine flow of spirits run dry, that people grew less fond of having him at their dinners in London, and Christmas parties in the country. His face had lost its cherubic proportions, and become as long as a visitation sermon. His joyous voice was acquiring a peevish inflexion. The tenor of his days had ceased to be *couleur de rose*. The inward canker of

money-love was beginning its ravages! Though he had never experienced the smallest temptation to run in debt, now that his credit was reduced to such diminutive proportions, he made it a grievance that, had he wished it ever so much, he could not have commanded the loan of a thousand pounds. This fractiousness was the more unlucky because, no sooner is it discovered in a regiment than a man possesses a *raw*, than it is played upon without mercy. His brother officers had no patience with Barty, their own generous, rough-and-ready Barty, for looking with such envious eyes on the happiness and good fortune of his brother.

There was a Lord James (no matter what) in our company, not a bad fellow in essentials, but so overflowing with spirits, from an accumulation of the prosperities of existence, that his liveliness was sometimes scarcely to be borne by fellows smarting under the rubs of life. With good health, good looks, good fortune, and good blood to create sunshine around him, he was a bad companion for a rainy day; for, so far from seeking to communicate his contentedness to others, his happy fortunes surrounded him with an atmosphere of egotism, like the malaria engendered by a luxuriant jungle.

"I shall come and ask you for a day's sport at Wrenhurst, on my way back from the Moors, Barty, my boy," said he, a month or two after the wedding; "I suppose you spend the shooting season in the North?"

"Most likely in town," was the morose reply.

"In town? Stuff and nonsense! September and October in the Tower, counting the sparrows perched on the weathercocks, when you have the best pheasant-shooting in England at your command"

"At my *brother's* command."

"What is *his* is yours, except his wife. By Jove, if *my* Cain were to make any demur about giving me shooting, for myself and friends, I should make no scruple about winging him!"

"The Duke of Gateshead and your lordship live on other terms than I and my brother," said Barty stiffly. "You have something to give in return."

"And so have *you*, if you'd the spirit to give it!—a good lesson—*à deux sous le cachet*. Only write Sir Robert word that since he does not choose to allow you a fair share of the family preserves—"

"Who said he did not *choose*?" interrupted Barty, peevishly. "Wait till I complain, before you redress my injuries. It does not follow that, because I am unable to offer pheasant-shooting to the brother of a duke who has manors in every county in England, I am on bad terms with Sir Robert Brookes!"

"Still, a brother whose minority must have been heaping up stacks of gold might surely contrive to—"

"When I want advice about my family affairs, my dear Lord James, I go to my family lawyer!" was the bitter retort of Barty, who hated to have his private history dragged out for the amusement of the mess. "When I consult you, I give you leave to favour me with your counsel."

It was only to *me* he spoke more freely. *I* was not so enscaled within the golden armour of prosperity as to render me insensible to the troubles of my friends. *I* could sympathize in his disappointments! It was not, however, about money that he complained. The "something" of which he felt himself robbed was not the other half of his fortune. "*It is hard,*" said he, "that a man like Robert," (he had ceased to call him Bob) "possessed of all the endowments of this life, could not leave so small a thing to his poor wretch of a younger brother as his guardian's poor relation! He was welcome to all the rest. He had no business to meddle with Emmy!"

All the love which united the two brothers in their nursing pinafore and nankin frocks—all the sympathy that made them sit hand-in-hand during the pantomime in the Christmas holidays, that they might support each other's courage at the explosion of the squibs, had already subsided into mere acquaintanceship, demonstrated on Sir Robert's part by an annual letter, to announce the sprouting of an olive branch;—on that of Barty by nothing. He did not wait till offence was given him. He chose to *take it*!

As I said before, I alone was in his confidence. But besides what he chose to confide, the chafings of his spirit showed themselves in a thousand nameless trifles. One Christmas, a couple of years after the marriage, I happened to be going down to stay with Lord and Lady Mandevale, who had made a party for the Bury ball (one of the best provincial meetings in England); and on the eve of my departure, knowing that his maiden aunt resided in the neighbourhood, I asked Barty for a letter of introduction. I know not whether his mind misgave him that I had canvassed for the invitation that was carrying me into Suffolk, expressly in the hope of renewing my acquaintance with Harriet, but he refused my request point blank. Had I been as apt as himself to take offence, there would have been an end of all friendship between us.

"Not the least chance of your meeting with my good aunt at the Bury ball!" said he, perceiving that his ungraciousness had offended me. "The worthy woman is too grave for such scenes, and too poor!"

"But I may, perhaps, meet Miss Brookes under the chaperonage of some other person?"

"In that case, the acquaintance you made with her at Hypocrisy Hall forestals the necessity for an introduction."

"I could almost fancy, Barty," said I, pettishly, "that you disapproved my acquaintance with your family!"

"And so I do!" was his gruff but honest answer. "Half the miseries in this world arise from acquaintanceships, rashly made, and entailing fatal results."

"And you fancy that a visit from *me* might entail fatal results on Oak Hill?" said I, with a forced smile.

"How came you to know the name of their residence?" interrupted he, with an air of growing suspicion.

"Considering the number of times I have seen letters addressed thither in your handwriting—"

"I have not written to either my aunt or sister these twelve months."

"Do not quarrel with me because my memory is better than your own," cried I. "Surely there is no crime in feeling an interest in the sister of my friend?"

"No crime, but prodigious folly!" retorted he. "I tell you again, my dear Percy, my sister is *poor*—as poor as *I* am—miserably poor!"—

"The greater the equality between us!" was my rash rejoinder.

"Curse the equality! Harriet must marry a rich man. Together, you would be wretched!—together, you would be contemptible!"

"I only ask an introduction to a partner at a ball—not to a partner for life."

"Ball-partnerships are the foundation of a thousand miserable matches."

"In one word, my dear Barty, you are awfully afraid of having me for a brother-in-law."

"Thanks to my having Sir Robert Brookes for a brother,—thanks to the cursed influence of Hypocrisy Hall, I have learned, to my cost, the misery of poverty. I know what it is, now, to be stinted at every turn, and ashamed to look one's valet in the face, because he is better dressed than oneself. Were I master of Wrenhurst, indeed, I would say make yourself acceptable to Harriet, if you *can*; and, if secure of her affections, nothing shall be wanting that brotherly regard can afford you. But I can do nothing. I am myself little better than a pauper. I must go struggling and striving on, to the end of my days; never drawing a free breath like a gentleman, or able to afford the comforts of life."

"Your brother cannot but advance the means of pushing you in your profession," I suggested, foreseeing one of his moods of crabbed despondency.

"My profession, my profession!" was his peevish rejoinder. "These are not times when the army can be called a profession. A poor captain in the Guards is as wretched a thing as a poor anything else. No, my dear Percy! mouth as we may about dis-

interestedness, and greatness of soul, and all that sort of rubbish, depend upon it money is the only thing that renders life palatable. A man of capital is the only man who is his own master, and the master of other people."

"I fear you are right!" said I, with a heavy sigh; "and, alas! the sore disease called poverty is hereditary in *my* family, as in some others the gout."

"Take my advice, therefore, my dear fellow!" cried he. "Go and dance at the Bury ball, without troubling your head about my sister. You will find plenty of charming partners besides Miss Brookes."

I took his advice, already aware that in ball-rooms neither Harriet nor her aunt was likely to be found. But the way in which he chose to prejudge the affair rendered it impossible for me to confide to him a fact, of which he remained in ignorance, almost unbrotherly; *i. e.* that Oak Hill was situated on the borders of Lord Mandevale's park, and that I was about to spend the Christmas holidays within a bow-shot of the garden of Eden. If I did not inform him of this previous to my departure, I was not likely to be more candid on my return; for it might have put an end to all friendship and good-will between us, to know that I had passed more than half the time of my absence in company with that dear Harriet to whom he seemed bent on keeping me a stranger!

Mandevale Park seemed perfectly aware that one of its highest titles to consideration arose from its contiguity to the humble little domain of Oak Hill. Not alone were Mrs. Brookes and her niece included in all its *fêtes*, but the Mandevales appeared to think it the most natural thing in the world that every morning after breakfast, instead of joining the shooting party or repairing to the billiard-room with the rest of the young men, I should be seen scudding along the park,—under an umbrella, too, for the weather was most unpropitious,—in the direction of the old house, said to be the original residence of the Mandevale family, before a rich marriage enabled them to erect their present handsome mansion. In calling the weather unpropitious, however, I talk like a fool; for it was perfection for a wooer. Thanks to Macintosh and caoutchouc, a man may present himself, in the worst of weather, as dry as a bag of Carolina rice, in defiance of rain, hail, or sleet. Whereas by concealing his clogs and umbrella in a dark corner of the hall, he is entitled to look out despondingly at the clouds, at what ought to be the close of his visit; so that not even the most hard-hearted of parents or guardians but must insist on his remaining "till it clears up." It scarcely "cleared up" during the ten days of my visit to the Mandevales! I conclude so, at least, for I scarcely ever left Oak Hill. Every evening, the aunt and niece joined our sociable party at the Hall; and the consequence was, that, just as Barty had predicted, the night of the

Bury ball was the only one we did not spend together. Mrs. Brookes's objection to large assemblies was not to be shaken by the entreaties of the Mandevales, that her niece might, for once in her life, enjoy the pleasures of a ball-room. For, alas! it was by enjoying them "once in *her* life," that her own days had been embittered. That little, frail, delicate-looking maiden aunt, whose complexion resembled one of Benvenuto Cellini's carvings in ivory, while the short hair, parted over her smooth forehead, was white as silver, had fallen into premature decrepitude, thanks to a single flirtation at a county ball. The attachment!—of which it laid the foundation—had never known a day of sunshine. The Brookes family had been *created* by the system of sacrificing the younger children to the aggrandizement of the elder son. For a time, indeed, the young couple had looked forward for the means of settling, to the bounties of the bachelor brother from whom Barty's father inherited his fortune; and when his sudden death was followed by the untimely decease of his successor, and a long minority, all hope of an addition to their scanty fortunes vanished; whereupon the poor soldier went with his regiment—a condemned regiment—to die in the West Indies; bequeathing to his plighted love the small patrimony they had trusted to enjoy together. It was this provision, small as it was, that enabled her to afford a home to her brother's orphan. But the domestic calamity in which it had its rise inspired her with an insurmountable abhorrence of public entertainments.

But they were the only things in the world she hated!—Impossible to see a gentler, milder, more feminine creature, than the woman under whose wing Harriet had acquired such serenity of nature. It was a strange proof of the force of prejudice, that she did not foresee the same dangers for her niece from mingling in the fashionable circle at Mandevale, as in a promiscuous ball-room. But her mind was swayed by a single fixed idea. In Mrs. Brookes's opinion, love was, of necessity, born amid the clang of an orchestra, and the flaring of chandeliers!—Whereas the Hall was a safe place. Lord Mandevale was her landlord, Lady Mandevale her friend; and their guests were persons belonging to those higher classes of society, which have little in common with a condemned regiment. For to the simple apprehension of one whose days had been divided between two country villages—the one where she saw the light, and the one where (as the birth-place of her lost love, and burial-place of his family) she hoped to resign it—rank and fortune were inseparable. I was wrong, perhaps, not to set her right on this point early in our acquaintance. But I had never suffered Harriet to remain in error; and it was her fault—if she could have a fault—that Mrs. Brookes was not duly apprized of my being nearly as bad a match as the poor fellow who had gone to die at Barbadoes. For, though the

little mild old lady liked me all the better for my red coat (as she would have done her nephew Barty, but for his contemptuous neglect), I doubt whether her predilection would have been increased by learning in how many respects the resemblance held good.—God knows I would have laid down *my* life for Harriet! I told her so—I am afraid I told her so!—After the warning I had received from Barty, and the misery I knew to have been occasioned in the family by indiscreet attachments, I *ought*, perhaps, to have kept a sterner guard over my feelings. But I ask you, in all candour, dear readers,—such of you, at least, as are made of penetrable stuff,—whether it was possible for a young fellow of three and twenty, desperately in love, to sit morning after morning beside the piano of a girl who sang old ballads and Handel's songs to him, as long as he chose to ask for them, in tones that wrung tears out of his heart; or between the two work-tables established on either side the fireplace of that neat, snug little drawing-room, so simply yet so tastefully furnished, where everything was so completely in its place, that, after spending a certain number of hours there, I fancied even *I* must have a right to be there,—I only ask you, I say, whether it was possible to preserve one's frigid reason in the midst of such intoxicating enjoyments?

As the sister of my friend, as the chosen of my heart, she seemed so much my own, that I could not forbear imploring her sympathy in that miserable want of fortune, which precluded me from entreating her permission to demand her hand.

CHAPTER IV

In wooing her, I found her of more value
Than stamps in gold or sums in sealed bags.—SHAKESPEARE.

You perhaps imagine, gentle reader, that on my return to London, my friendship with Barty became cemented into still warmer intimacy by my passion for his sister?—On the contrary, a wall of ice seemed to have arisen between us! In his company, I felt guilty and ashamed. After replying frankly to the inquiry which accompanied his first shake-hands, of “whether I had seen the old lady and Harriet,” that both were well, I satisfied my conscience by apprising him that neither argument nor persuasion had induced Mrs. Brookes to sanction the appearance of her niece at the Bury ball.

“Right—quite right!” cried he. “Why inspire poor Harriet with a taste for pleasures which her fortune will never enable her to enjoy?”

“People take their daughters to such places,” said I, endeavouring to smile, “expressly that they may accomplish the fortunes enabling them to enjoy them.”

"Husband-hunting, eh?—For that, Heaven be thanked, my old maid of an aunt is too highminded!"

"Still," pleaded I, "if, in a ball-room, people's means and appliances were scrupulously examined, surely few would show a better title to be there than Miss Brookes?"

"As the old lady is luckily of the same way of thinking as myself, we will not dispute the matter!" said he. "Enough that a ball-room marred the happiness for life of *one* of the family!—But for my aunt's imprudent attachment, she might have made more than one good match."

By all this, I saw that the moment was not propitious for confiding to him all that Harriet had determined to renounce for my sake; or assuring him that *my* future happiness was comprehended in the little drawing-room at Oak Hill. And, by a natural consequence, concealment begat coldness. I began to see less of him;—partly, because I felt like a liar and hypocrite in his company; partly, because the discontents engendered by his bootless aspirations after riches rendered it insupportable! A third son having been born at Wrenhurst, there was no longer the smallest chance of assistance in that quarter. Sir Robert expressed himself somewhat peevishly, indeed, in announcing this rapid increase of his olive branches; though he was careful to add that never was man blessed with so thrifty and frugal a wife. But, according to his account, poor Emmy was beginning to deny herself the necessaries of life, in order that the junior branches might be properly provided for.

Much to the advantage of my purse and my constancy, our battalion was just then quartered at Windsor. We led a quiet life of it. At that time, there was no railway to whisk one from Slough to London and back, and our fellows were consequently forced to content themselves with glimpses of their London loves, on such rare occasions as Ascot Races, Eton Montem, or the Rowing Match. By way of cloak to the consciousness of having his heart full and his pockets empty, Barty, under these circumstances, affected the country gentleman; a character which his skill in athletic exercises enabled him to support with more credit than most of his brother officers. As the best bat at Lord's, he carried the day in whatever cricket-match he chose to engage; and in our rowing-matches to Maidenhead Bridge, no one ventured to bet against the boat among whose crew was Barty Brookes. From a natural preference of my barrack-room, with its sketch-books and music-books, to such pastimes, I was voted a spoony. But I was not the less interested in the manly triumphs of my friend. Still, this discrepancy of habits served to widen the distance between us. As a sportsman, Barty was led to form a hundred new connections of whom I knew nothing. He was becoming as popular in the country as ever he had been about town.

Too much occupied with the lights and shadows of my own heart to give much heed to these absences of Barty, I had some difficulty in making out the meaning of certain significant smiles which, towards the end of the summer, began to curl the lips of my brother officers whenever I enquired where Barty was dining. Even when they answered me in so many words, "at Datchet!" even when Lord James threw himself back in his chair and crowed like chanticleer at my simplicity, I was not much the wiser.

"You are really *impayable*, my dear Percy," cried he. "Where do you put your eyes, ears, and understanding, not to know that Barty dines to-day where he dined yesterday, and will dine to-morrow, if he can persuade you to be such an ass as to take his guard for him—at Datchet!"

"But there is no *inn* at Datchet?" said I, as if fancying a Botham's the only dining place for young guardsmen; "and who on earth can he possibly know there?"

"Better ask him to-night, when he comes home! Perhaps he may take the question better from *you* than he has from *us*!"

I did ask him on the morrow; and his answer, so far from being pettish, as Lord James's hints had prepared me to expect, was more gracious than anything I had extracted from him since my visit to Suffolk. My suspicions were almost excited by his unusual amenity. His softened manner argued of the man in love.

"I dined at Datchet Mead," said he, in answer to my inquiry. "I dined at the Stanleys."

"The Stanleys? Anything to Lord Derby?"

"Not that I am aware of; kind, hospitable people, but not what men like Lord James understand by people of the world."

"And young?"

"The portion of the family in whom youth is a merit cannot be called old," replied Barty, without resenting my inquisitiveness. "Mrs. Stanley is not above five-and-twenty, and as pretty as five-and-twenty ought to be. Stanley is past fifty."

I could now understand why so many mouths were screwed up at mess, whenever I inquired "what Barty could possibly be doing at Datchet?" and determined to inquire further on the subject, though not of *him*! I was afraid my dear Harriet's brother might be in danger!

"Burn his fingers? Yes, I should think he *would* burn his fingers!" was Lord James's ready reply to my cross-questioning. "Stanley is anything but a man to be trifled with. Stanley is surly and burly as an ogre."

"And his lady as pretty as Barty represents her?"

"At all events, pretty enough to pass for an angel in country quarters! Their place, too, is a pleasant, cool, quaint, green kind of place. Lisbon House they call it, because built and inhabited in Charles the Second's time by some Portuguese ambassador.

The curious evergreens with which the gardens are darkened are said to have been planted in his time."

"I don't care about the evergreens, I want to know about Mrs. Stanley. Is she dangerous? Is she clever as well as pretty?"

"The most dangerous women I recognise, my dear fellow, are pretty fools!" retorted Lord James. "A blue beauty, like the rattlesnake, carries her own antidote. But Mrs. Stanley is, I fancy, neither a genius nor a natural. The sort of person one finds it convenient to dine with twice a-week—that is, after recommending her husband a new wine merchant, and establishing oneself on the footing of sending one's clothes to the house to dress."

"And is it on *this* system Barty Brookes is living with the Stanleys?"

"He is a greater fool than I take him for if he accept them on any other! Stanley is a regular snob—a reading man—the sort of fellow only seen at the Alfred, or Thorpe's book sales. But as he is wise enough to perceive that Barty's assiduities relieve him from the *peine forte et dure* of entertaining his foolish wife, our friend is allowed to make *la pluie et le beau temps* in the house."

A sad account this; for, glibly as such things are talked of in their opening chapter, there comes a time when smooth becomes rough, and the friends who have jested so pleasantly and barefacedly on the *liaison*, resent being subpoenaed to give evidence in a witness-box. But Barty and I were sufficiently friends for me to say to him in an off-hand manner,—“Take care you do not get into a scrape! With a couple so ill matched in respect to age as the Stanleys, it is always ten to one that the husband wants to get rid of his wife.”

“And the wife of her husband! But, trust me, I am not the cat's-paw for such a purpose. I have too much respect for the holy institution of matrimony, not to be carefully on my guard.”

I was too much absorbed, just then, by my own feelings, to interest myself in the affairs of strangers. Mr. Stanley was to *me* only a name. I had not so much as seen him; and, as he was decidedly of an age to take care both of himself and his wife, I left him to his fate.

At the period in question, the private drives in Windsor Park and Forest were even more strictly reserved than now. A few families of consideration in the neighbourhood, however, were favoured with keys; and during the absence of the royal family from the Castle, a key of office belonging to a person high in the household was at the disposal of Brookes, myself, and one or two other of my brother officers. I was pretty nearly the only one of them who ever profited by the privilege. A man in love delights in the loneliest of haunts; and there was something soothing in the noble sweep of evergreens adjoining the Virginia water,—the long, long shrubbery, with its short herbage, seldom travelled by a

heavier footfall than the scudding rabbits abounding on the spot, or any other living thing but the wood pigeons, whose shadows flitted across the turf as they winged their way high over head in the sunshine. Of late, however, I had been several times disappointed in my application for the key. "Captain Brookes" (all young officers are captains to a footman) had been beforehand with me. I was a little surprised: for Barty was a man to prefer the Long Walk, or the London-road, or any other of the king's highways, to rural privacy. I had never expected to find my solitary haunts invaded by Barty! As it was impossible for both the kings of Brentford to reign at once on the spot, I had no means of verifying whether he appropriated the key to his own use, or that of some friend. He seldom dined at mess; and, when we met on duty, there were other matters to be discussed. One sultry summer day, however, when the heat of the weather suggested to the utmost the charm of the gloomy pine walk, with its resinous shade, and the glassy surface of the Virginia water glittering at intervals between, to suggest sensations of freshness and coolness, I was so fortunate as to monopolise the key. By an early application, I forestalled my brother officers; and was off, with a biscuit and a volume of Wordsworth in my pocket, before the eyes of fashionable young gentlemen, like Barty Brookes and Lord James, were half unclosed! I intended to muse away the day, till dinner-time, in the neighbourhood of the Belvedere. I was monarch of all I surveyed. The Court was away. Not a human being was stirring, except at intervals a park-keeper with his dog-whip under his arm, and a pointer puppy at his heels. It struck me that to one of these worthies I must be an object of suspicion; for I plainly saw him watching me from a distance; and, when I moved from the position I had taken up, he appeared to be cautiously dogging me. I had half a mind to go boldly up to the fellow, and satisfy any misgivings he might entertain about my right to be there, by exhibiting my official key. But the moment I started to fulfil my purpose, he was off with hastier strides than my own. Shortly afterwards, having reached one of the heights commanding a view of the farm, as I stood looking down upon a field of buckwheat in full bloom that promised well for the royal pheasants, I discovered the same keeper accompanied by a second, hurrying back towards the walk, as if desirous to have a witness of my presence. At that moment, however, I was too much struck by the lowering aspect of the weather to take further heed of his movements. A storm was coming on, and my only object was to hurry on towards the nearest gate, from which I was nearly a mile distant, that I might make my way into Black Ness road, for the chance of some passing vehicle to expedite my passage across the park. Just as I reached within a hundred yards of the gate, it was impetuously opened from without, and in came the person I had noticed at a distance

as accompanying the keeper, who, instead of a comrade, proved to be a middle-aged gentleman. For some unexplained reason, however, they certainly *had* been walking together as companions. For, the moment the gate was flung open, I saw him skulk off. But the glitter of the gold lace on his collar was perceptible, even at a distance, against the dark masses of Portugal laurels.

At any other moment, my curiosity would have been excited by this strange intrusion. But the rain was, by this time, falling so heavily that, unprovided with an umbrella, all my care was to get under shelter, till the heavy thunder-shower was past. Already several sharp flashes had vivified the now gloomy expanse of the Virginia water; and the thunder was booming with considerable grandeur among the surrounding hills. I found leisure to appreciate its grandeur, by stationing myself to the windward of the lofty palings, so as to defy the pelting rain: and decided, on seeing the stranger establish himself in the same position, that the impetuous movements which had so surprised me originated in his anxiety to reach its shelter before the commencement of the storm. "What mysteries," thought I, "one is sometimes tempted to create out of the most trivial occurrences!"—At a distance, I was half inclined to convert this gentlemanly old man into a constable!

Strange to tell, as the storm darkened his countenance grew more cheerful. Cowering as we were side by side against the palings, that secured us from the driving rain, it was impossible to retain the reserve of strangeness; and, after mutually congratulating each other on not being exposed to such a downpour in the midst of the clayey plain, we soon made acquaintance. I thought it odd, however, that when I deplored the disappointment of my day in the woods, *he* should hail the change of weather as if a blessing. He seemed in the highest spirits.—He was probably a farmer.—Perhaps the country wanted rain. By degrees, as the patter upon the leaves of the evergreens grew less unrelenting, our intimacy ripened. The kind-hearted old gentleman informed me that his carriage was waiting for him at Black Ness Gate, scarcely half a mile distant, and that, after leaving him at his house, it might convey me to the barracks. My buttons proved me to belong to the battalion of Guards quartered at Windsor. But it was only after I had accepted his offer, and we were actually in the chariot together on the high road, that he announced *his* name to be—Stanley!

By the time we approached the old crumbling brick-wall of Lisbon House, with its projecting summer-house at each angle of the garden, and a profusion of white and red snapdragon starting from every crevice, we had so warmed into friendship, that he insisted upon my accompanying him home to dinner.

"As the friend of his young friend Mr. Brookes, he knew me

perfectly by name and reputation. He could not think of allowing me to take an hour's drive in my wet clothes. He would send off a groom to Windsor for my servant. I should have Mr. Brookes's room."

I must tell you that this spontaneous glow of old Stanley in my favour appeared to arise from my answer to his interrogation as to whether I was in the habit of frequenting the walk where our encounter took place.

"Almost daily!" was my frank reply. And there was something so fervent in the murmur of "Thank God!" that escaped his lips, as to place me instantly on my guard.

I now saw clearly that I *had* been watched: but watched only because mistaken for another.

When, therefore, my kind host proceeded to inquire whether my friend Mr. Brookes had not *also* a key of the private drives, or access to such a key, I replied evasively, that "if he had, I should think him the last man in the regiment likely to take advantage of it. Brookes was always boating or cricketing.—Brookes was too fond of noise and society, to find pleasure in such haunts."

"I thought so—I said so—I was sure it would turn out to be a mistake!" exclaimed the delighted old man. "Idle people are so fond of making mischief!"

And it was not for me to acquaint him how completely he was betraying his feelings.

"How should the keepers know one officer from another?" added he, as if talking to himself. "They are nearly of a height. I knew it would turn out a mistake!"

CHAPTER V.

They say the devil snake did tempt the woman.

But, ha! ha! ha! *who* tempted *him* to tempt?

Give me good answer there?—Why, 'twas the woman.

The fiend found somewhat which did stir his blood

(If blood he had,)—some sting—some appetite.

The love of evil?—Well, what caused the love?

What was't that first begot the insane touch

Which crept amidst his bright and rancorous scales?

What sight—or sound—or dream?—'Twas she! the WOMAN!

BARRY CORNWALL.

A flower-garden is always doubly delicious after a thunder-shower. But I do not remember to have been ever more struck by the fragrance and freshness of a spot, no, not even of Oak Hill, than by the quaint old garden at Lisbon House. I hate a modern villa. There is an ostentation of pert insignificance about the architectural attempts of such places, with their ridiculous serpentine walks, fanciful grassplots, and shrubberies like an em-

broidered cambric handkerchief too transparent for use, which strikes me as ludicrous and offensive. But I love the honest brick-built wayside country-house, within gates; its half-a-dozen acres surrounded by a high wall; its green lawn as square as a sheet of paper; its undeviating paths rectangular as New Harmony; its fine old cedar, solitary as its sundial. The garden at Lisbon House was full of old-fashioned trees and old-fashioned flowers. It might have sheltered the learned leisure of Sir William Temple. In spite of its Portuguese designation, it was as Dutch as if transplanted from the Hague! I can almost fancy myself inhaling at this moment the overgrown masses of honeysuckle, sweetbriar, and jessamine, clinging to the old walls; and the fraxinella, and dying strawberry leaves, throwing out, as Bacon hath it, "a fine cordial smell."

"Mrs. Stanley will be ready to welcome us. Yes, I am pretty sure Mrs. Stanley must be at home. The storm seems to have fallen as heavy here as at Black Ness, so that perhaps my absence may have made her uneasy," observed my companion, when, the huge iron gates having been thrown open, we rolled round the old-fashioned forecourt, and stopped at a door, the sides of whose lofty granite steps were clothed with greenhouse plants. And already I was beginning to enter so thoroughly into his situation, as to follow the glancing of his eye with the utmost anxiety along the façade of the mansion; hoping, as he did, to detect the gleam of a white dress on the look-out for him, at one of the windows. It would have been a comfort to me to know that the storm *had* rendered Mrs. Stanley anxious.

No vestige of her, however! Only a venerable, grey-headed butler, who met us in the hall, full of interest in his master's wet garments. He seemed indignant when Mr. Stanley, instead of listening to his suggestions of an immediate change, kept inquiring about his lady, and pushing his way across the hall, through an old oak passage with a domed and painted ceiling, towards a certain square cedar parlour, opening to the flower-garden at the rear of the house, which was nearly four feet below its level. There, indeed, we found the lady of the house; neither anxious nor alarmed, but quietly occupied with her work, as though stitching were the object of her life. As we entered the room, she raised her expressive eyes (which Lord James had amused himself with comparing to sapphires set with diamonds) to her husband's face; and in a moment I was forced to admit, that to lose even so much as *one* of those looks of hers, must be, indeed, a loss! I no longer wondered that, if Mr. Stanley had reason to suspect her of wandering occasionally in the Belvedere walk with Barty, he should think it worth while to verify the fact, even in the teeth of a thunder-storm.

When presented to her by her husband, I saw that my name

was already familiar to her, as Barty's friend. Though still agitated by the violence of the recent storm, she instantly exerted herself to please. One knows so well when a woman *tries* to please! And though the chances are, that she would please three times as much by *not* trying, the *effort* is gratifying, however unsatisfactory the result. Mrs. Stanley took such care that I should be comfortably installed in the room usually appropriated to "my friend," and that no time should be lost in fetching my things, and making me at home, that, before dinner was served, I was half in love with her myself. Before it was *over*, I had sworn a second oath to myself that her happiness should not be sacrificed to the selfish vanity of an idle ensign in country quarters. I found in the Mr. Stanley opprobriated by Lord James as "a regular snob" in manners, one of the most amiable of men, and in mind one of the best informed. Hospitable too to excess, almost to a fault; or, so soon after his cause to regret the introduction of one Guardsman into his house, he would scarcely have been so rash as, without cause or necessity, to become the host of another.

But I saw he fancied change of society as indispensable as the air she breathed to the happiness of his young wife; and though it distracted him to watch her in company with her admirers, he had not courage to see her pining with ennui. It was like a doating parent, unable to withhold pernicious sweetmeats from his child!

Pleasant as was the evening I thus unexpectedly spent in the society of those who had previously so highly raised my curiosity, it was deteriorated by regret at contemplating happiness so nearly perfect as seemed within their reach, in danger of being injured, past redemption, to enliven the idle hours of a purposeless boy. In higher life and gayer scenes, I had witnessed, without much remorse, the domestic peace of more than one noble husband in similar peril. But the unreality and artificiality of *their* lives seemed to guarantee them against any fatal degree of heartbreak on the discovery of their wrongs. As Charles Lamb observes, to palliate our toleration of the morality of the old comedies, "Nobody cares who is the father of Lord Froth's or Sir Paul Pliant's children."

But it was not so at Lisbon House. *There* was no glitter of fortune. *There* was no pretension to distinction. Mr. Stanley was descended from a lawyer who had risen to public honours under the patronage of Sir Robert Walpole. The utmost opulence of his successors did not exceed two thousand a-year; and he lived in his square old house, as his grandfather had done before him, in comfort, but not luxury. The family pictures on the walls were those of neither baron nor senator; but prim-looking gentlemen in tie-wigs, with prim-looking ladies in grey tabby with white bibs and tuckers; the highly respectable ancestors of a highly re-

spectable race, who still ate and drank out of the old-fashioned plate and Chelsea china they had bequeathed them; and it was Mrs. Stanley's own fault that she did not also parade the same strings of garnets, and ill-set rose diamonds, that figured in the portrait in crayons of Mr. Stanley's grandmother. The servants in attendance were old family servants; the books on the bookshelves were old family books. Nothing new or fresh within those walls, but the lovely young woman, who seemed to have crossed its threshold in an evil hour for her own destiny, and that of its inmates.

Whether the mischief perpetrated in that house by my friend Barty was already irreparable, was an enigma which I exercised my utmost power of discernment to unravel. I watched both husband and wife, and before the close of the evening had made up my mind that the grey-haired yet sensitive old man was perplexed by agonizing mistrust of all that was going on under his eyes, while to Mrs. Stanley the man who had married her chiefly to secure an honourable home to the unprotected and necessitous orphan of a friend was an object of disgust. I noticed her, when she thought no one was observing, remove the cup of tea he had poured out, and prepare another for herself, and, remembering the anecdote of Napoleon, touching Sir Hudson Lowe and the coffee cup, made a shrewd guess at the nature of her feelings.

Impossible to pass over in silence my visit to Lisbon House, I hurried to Barty's barrack-room the following day, expressly to inform him that I had made the acquaintance of his friend, and warn him that Mr. Stanley had taken to morning walks in the shrubberies adjoining the Virginia Water. But to this point of information the fractious fellow never suffered me to reach.

"What the devil took you to the Stanleys?" cried he, after the opening phrase of my discourse. "They are nothing to you, nor you to them! You seem to take delight in introducing yourself to all to whom I have private reasons for wishing you to remain a stranger!"

This was ungracious and provoking enough; but I thought of Harriet, and was resolved not to be affronted.

"Were I to explain to you," said I, "the accident which brought me in contact with the Stanleys, you would perceive that the introduction was as much to your advantage as mine."

"As I am neither superannuated nor paralytic, I can assure you that I feel fully competent to the management of my own affairs," was his peevish rejoinder, by which I was sufficiently vexed to determine on leaving him to his ill-humour.

When I came, however, to turn over in my mind all that had fallen from Mr. Stanley, and my conviction that the keepers had been bribed to watch, in consequence of information he had received concerning the morning promenades of Barty and his

wife, it went against my conscience not to place the former on his guard. Conquering my resentment, therefore, within ten minutes I returned into the room I had quitted, and, in spite of his surly looks, related to him circumstantially every particular of my interview with Stanley. At the close of my communication, Barty rose from his seat, and came towards me, extending his hand.

"Thanks!" said he. "You have done me a great service! Forgive my having been so great a brute just now; but, on such points, most men are captious. I am afraid," added Barty, with one of the open smiles which so well became his handsome face, "that on most points I am captious. A disappointed fellow like myself is apt to take the world *en grippe*."

"I was in hopes that you did not include me with the rest of the world!" said I.

"I ought not, for you are a good fellow, and have proved a steady friend!" sighed Barty; and this allusion sealed my lips at once, for I felt certain he alluded to the one or two emergencies in which my purse had been open to him, rather than to the warm regard which placed my arm and heart at his disposal every day of the year.

"The truth is," continued Barty, as if arguing with himself, "that to a fellow situated as I am, every idle chatterbox presumes to offer advice, till, hunted into a corner, one turns like a tiger at bay upon friend and foe. That conceited ass, Lord James, is always at me about the Stanleys. What is it to him, I should like to know, whether I dine or sleep too often at Lisbon House, or whether my company is as acceptable to the husband as the wife? except, indeed, that when we arrived together at Windsor he attempted to obtain the same advantages, and was most egregiously snubbed!"

"But I, my dear Brookes, never aspired to the same advantages," pleaded I, eager to lead him to the more important part of the question, "and you may therefore believe in my unprejudiced assurance, that your intimacy in the house is likely to be productive of lasting misery to all parties."

"Like Joseph Surface, in short, you are afraid that I have lately given that worthy man, Sir Peter, much uneasiness," said Barty, bursting into a provoking laugh. "My dear friend, you don't know old Stanley. Old Stanley is a man who had passed through life without a sensation, till he had the supreme luck to make my acquaintance—a mere bookworm, a fossil specimen, without passions and without joys. Surely he ought to thank rather than reproach me, for giving a fillip to his languid existence."

"Commend me to the gratitude of a person enjoying a state of perfect ease and contentment, to those who have subjected him to pain and torment!"

"In that case," was Barty's careless rejoinder, "you are still heart-whole, or you would know that

The sweet perplexities of love,
Whose agony delights,

are torments to be ever thankful for."

"But Mr. Stanley's perplexities are not exactly those of love!" persisted I, trusting to exhaust his vein of levity, and bring him to reason; "and I can assure you, my dear Barty, that there are moments when the expression of his eyes, as they rest upon that beautiful creature—"

"She is beautiful, is she not?" interrupted he, in a scarcely audible voice.

"Denoted feelings which a soul in torment would have shrunk from!" continued I, without administering the flattering unction he demanded; "and you ought seriously to reflect before you endanger Mrs. Stanley's position in society, and still more her position in the happy home of an indulgent husband, whether you have so much as food and raiment to offer her, should your conduct cause her to be expelled from under his roof."

"Ay, there it is!—there it is!" cried Barty. "Poverty, always poverty!—always one's miserable, grinding, penniless condition staring one in the face! If I were rich enough to maintain Mrs. Stanley in case of extremity, the deuce a bit would you trouble your head about the immoralities of the affair. These qualms of conscience of yours, my dear Percy, are caused by the chance of our coming upon the parish, not of our going to the devil."

"I would rather find you safe from both extremes!" replied I, determined not to be piqued. "But do me the justice to admit that, though I have heard little else at mess than your flirtation for the last six weeks, I never annoyed you by the slightest allusion to it, till my insight into the domestic happiness you were destroying inspired me with the feelings of remorse that ought to be your own."

"Domestic happiness!" reiterated Barty, with a scornful shrug of the shoulders; "what an abuse of terms, or what hypocritical self-deception! *Can* you, in all honesty, apply one of the holiest words in the language to such a connection as that of the Stanleys?"

"Are they not married then?" cried I, with the most naïf simplicity.

"Married?—to be sure they are,—according to the canons of the Holy Mother Church,—if you call *that* matrimony! But where was the better feeling that should prompt or accompany such a sacrament? Where was the devoted attachment which is the very soul of marriage? The match was a mere bargain—as much an affair of money as the purchasing a horse or a register-stove! Ethel was the orphan daughter of one of Stanley's friends; a public accountant, who, finding himself a defaulter, had not courage to look his disgrace in the face, and blew out his brains. The world

considered it an act of wonderful generosity on the part of Stanley, who was a rich old bachelor, that he fitted out the son for India (where he died), and placed the daughter at school, where perhaps she had better have died also. Cold-blooded rogue! Aware that he possessed no single quality capable of attaching a woman's heart, he thus bought himself a wife:—bought her by the slow, economical process of yearly instalments. When Ethel grew up, she found herself without a home, and encumbered with a benefactor."

"And *without* a benefactor, what would have become of her?" interrupted I.

"I suppose it was *that* consideration which determined the poor girl to give him her hand. Their relative position did not admit of her residing, as an unmarried girl, under his roof; and, rather than remain at the country school which formed her only alternative, she almost proposed to him to make her his wife."

"And you blame him for accepting?"

"Blame him, and execrate him! She was an artless child. He an artful, calculating wretch, who had created the predicament requiring such an extrication. Had Stanley been the high-souled man of honour you endeavour to make him out, he would have said to the poor girl, 'Here is the capital of the income I have hitherto devoted to you. Marry a man of your own age and pursuits.'"

"And where was such a person to be found by a girl immured in a boarding-school? Absurd! Mrs. Stanley realised her wish of emancipation, though perhaps at the sacrifice of his own comfort for life."

"A mighty sacrifice, to marry a lovely girl of eighteen!"

"A girl of eighteen is a thorny rose for the bosom of a man of fifty,—as the sequel has proved!"

"His meanness has only met with fitting retribution. It is enough, by Heaven, to disgust one with one's species, and make one curse the day one was born, to see the influence exercised by money over all the finer feelings of human nature! It is not the mortification of wearing a seedy coat, or being splashed by some saucy fool as one tramps in spatterdashes, that renders poverty so galling a grievance. But to find the affections one covets forestalled, like places at a theatre, by the first beast who comes with ready money in his hand!"

"I will not hear you utter such treason," said I, starting indignantly from my chair; for with Harriet enshrined in my heart, it little became me to listen to blasphemy against the sex.

"Do not deny, unless you can disprove!" retorted Party. "Look at me! Look at my destinies! When I quitted old Broadham's cursed double-faced penitentiary, that girl who, like all the rest of the world, believed me sure of a gentleman's inheritance, had pro-

mised to be mine the moment I was able to claim her hand. She wore my hair,—she wore the ring that sealed our troth-plight. For some time we corresponded; and it was only her pretended terror lest our letters should be intercepted and means taken to prevent our further intercourse, that induced me to relinquish the correspondence. Without fear, however. For her last letter to me swore, by all the pretty oaths a woman has at her command, that, if she remained weeks, months, years, without hearing from me, so long as she knew me to be alive, *so* long would she be faithful to her word! You know the rest. My brother came and bought me out of her heart! He was rich, and I was poor. It was enough! Nay—my very prospects in life, such as they were, were sacrificed without mercy to repay her treachery by lining her pockets with gold!”

“You had surely little to lament in losing a wife capable of such baseness!” was my sincere rejoinder.

“And now, look at my second dilemma!” cried Barty. “After the conduct of Emmy, apparently one of the simplest-hearted of God’s creatures, I sealed my soul for the remainder of my days; and vowed that nothing should again induce me to put faith in woman. You must have noticed how carefully I abstained from female society. The whole tenor of my life was changed: tennis and billiards, the river or the meadow, sufficed me. Chance threw me in the way of the Stanleys. At first, it was the quiet gentlemanly old man I sought, who was never weary of taking down the missals and black-letter books from his library for my amusement. I liked his old Madeira, and his old house. I thought so, at least. But perhaps all the time I deceived myself. Perhaps, from the first, it was his young wife that attached me to Datchet. On the day, however, that I first owned as much to myself, it was simply because I had learned her story,—simply because I knew her to be a victim. Since that time, I have ceased to ask myself questions on the subject. I take the day as it comes, with its pains and pleasures, without care for the morrow. And but that you have wrenched all this out of my heart, my dear Percy, by your direct interrogation, should never, even in the secrecy of my chamber, have endeavoured to untwist the entangled skein.”

Touched to the quick by this unwonted frankness, earnestly did I adjure him, now that his heart was open, to cleanse it to the utmost of the perilous stuff that threatened danger to so many. I appealed to his sense of justice,—I appealed to his generosity,—to his pride!—But, alas! my friend Barty

Had ceased
To justify his deeds unto himself,—
The last infirmity of evil!

I could only entrust his fate to the care of a Providence, mightier than that of friendship itself!

CHAPTER VI.

Faith fills the vacant place
Which young affection's absence makes. The man
Who builds the temple of his happiness
On love alone, has but a poor foundation :
But he who roots his hope in virtue's soil
May mock the seasons' change. His home stands firm—
A tower of adamant, unmov'd amidst
The storms of fortune.

LORD BEAUMONT.

A FEW days after this conversation, we were invited to dine together with the Stanleys. I was about to excuse myself, when Barty entreated me so earnestly to accept the invitation, that, fancying he wished to place a restraint on his own conduct by the presence of an interested observer, I complied. Scarcely was my note gone, when to my infinite mortification he added, "Had you pleaded an engagement, you see, I should have been forced to decline the use of Stanley's carriage, which he has offered to send for us. I could not have had it out for myself alone."

"And you literally allow him to *send* for you?" cried I, with increasing indignation.

"Why not?—It exercises his horses, which *his* studious habits and Ethel's sedentary ones would otherwise leave to die of fat. By her own will, Mrs Stanley would never stir further than from the house to the garden, and back again. People affect to pity Turkish and Chinese wives; whereas, half the women in the world, were their instincts consulted, would prefer the same mode of existence."

I saw he was trying to lead me from the question of his unprincipled selfishness;—and, to avoid a quarrel, was forced to submit to be led.

As we were on our way to dine at Lisbon House, Barty took occasion to observe, while reclining in a corner of poor old Stanley's carriage, that, if I did not object, he would order it early to go home. "He had a letter to write for the morrow's post, which, having a long day's duty before him, he did not care to postpone."

It was so unusual a thing for Barty to talk about letters as a matter of consequence, that I enquired, as he probably intended I should, whether another olive branch was sprouting at Wrenhurst, to require his congratulations; or whether old Broadham kept up a correspondence with him now that their guardianship account was balanced.

"Broadham still acts as my banker," said he. "In these bad times, a friend in the city is no bad thing, to put one in the way of getting better interest for one's money. The bothering letter I have got to write to-night, however, is to my worthy aunt."

Saying which, he took from his pocket a letter from Mrs. Brookes,

both crossed and recrossed; the third page of which contained a few lines in the well-known handwriting of Harriet!

"Insignificant as I may appear to Sir Robert and the Tartuffes of Hypocrisy House," said he, with a scornful smile, "I still remain the oracle of the petticoats of the family. My sister and aunt have prodigious confidence in my opinion. With *them* my yea or nay suffices."

"They appear to have made a somewhat lengthy appeal to your judgment on the present occasion," I rejoined, glancing at the letter, while all the blood in my body seemed tingling in my ears; so convinced was I that it bore reference to myself.

"Lengthy and unreasonable! They want me to decide for them whether Harriet is to accept a man I have never seen; and of whom, previous to this rigmarole letter, I had never heard! It was therefore necessary to supply me with more facts and features than anything short of my poor aunt's leisure and circumstantiality could ever have found means to commit to paper."

I was speechless! This man, whom I had been provoking, this man whom I had been frustrating in his purposes, held in his hand the fiat of my happiness or misery for life!

"And which way do you intend to turn the scale?" said I, jocosely; flattering myself I had assumed an air of perfect unconcern. "To wed or not to wed—that is the question."

"I am disposed to say—to wed!" replied Barty, with all the nonchalance I was vainly endeavouring to assume. "Harriet is now nearly of age—nay, by Jove! nearly two and twenty. Her prospects are far from brilliant. In the event of my aunt's death, she has no one to depend upon but myself; and I need not tell you that I find number one almost more than I am able to take care of. She wants a home, in short; and a home, and a happy and brilliant one, this new Romeo of hers is able to afford her."

Oh! what a heart-sickness came upon me, as I listened! Though the windows of the carriage were all down, I literally gasped for breath.

"You see how right I was," resumed Barty, taking no more heed of my agitation than one does of the gapings of a gold fish in its globe, "in confirming the old lady's objection to public balls. If women would only remain quiet, *partis* are sure to present themselves. Half a dozen London seasons would not have secured a better match for my sister than this Lord Donnington. Donnington has a clear twenty thousand a-year!"

Luckily for me that we were already within sight of the old snapdragoned wall. It was *impossible* to retain much longer my air of equanimity.

"Such a marriage could scarcely fail to please me," added

Barty; "as my sister, being thus nobly provided for, I naturally insure the inheritance of the old lady."

"But you do not mean," cried I, hurriedly, just as we reached the iron gates, "that you would sacrifice the happiness of Miss Brookes for the attainment of a few thousand pounds?"

"Sacrifice her happiness? Of course not! But when a girl's affections are disengaged (as I know Harriet's to be), I can conceive no possible obstacle to her happiness in such a match as the one that presents itself."

We were already in the hall. We were soon in the oak passage. No possibility of rejoinder, even though my heart was bursting. The announcement of our names compelled me to answer the formal compliments of the Stanleys, and a thousand idle questions from the numerous party assembled. But I spoke like a fool. I could scarcely disentangle my perplexed thoughts. Had Harriet *really* confided to her brother her indifference to me—her readiness to become the wife of another? Or was all this only the result of a petty vengeance employed to punish my observations on his intimacy with the Stanleys? Had she commissioned him to apprise me of Lord Donnington's proposal; or was the intimation a volunteer of his own?

So thoroughly was I beginning to mistrust the man capable of such a game as I saw him playing at Datchet, that I determined to address myself at once to his sister, for a solution of the mystery. The straight road is ever the shortest. Harriet's answer might break my heart; but, at least, it would set my mind at rest.

How unreal appeared everything that was passing around me that day at Lisbon House! I seemed to be moving in a dream. To the gravest questions, I fancy I answered with a hollow laugh; and more than once in the course of the evening the kind-hearted Mr. Stanley inquired whether I felt ill. Lord James, who was of the party, (which he treated with the cool insolence of dropping in towards the middle of the second course) could scarcely retain his merriment at the strange blunders of which I was guilty at the whist-table. But even *he* laughed no longer, when he heard me, in a fit of preoccupation, address our fair hostess by the name of Mrs. Brookes. I forgave all his impertinence, however, on finding that he had settled to accompany Barty and myself on our return.

"You must book me to-night in your Datchet omnibus, my dear Barty," said he, "for my horse is knocked up." And, in the joy of thus escaping a second *tete-a-tete* with Harriet's brother, I turned a deaf ear to his ungrateful allusions to the man of whose hospitality he was partaking.

But, though firm in my intention of appealing to Miss Brookes for an explanation of her intentions, no sooner did I find myself pen in hand, with the paper before me, than I became sensible of the trying nature of the task I had undertaken. What was I to

say to her? Persuade her to renounce the most brilliant prospects in favour of one who had so little to offer besides his love? Remind her of promises she seemed disposed to forget, and urge her to throw herself away in defiance of the dictates of her reason—the advice of her family—the remonstrances of her friends? Many hours did I consume in writing and re-writing all that was passing in my mind. A grand mistake! for in matters of feeling, the first letter written is the one to be sent; as surely as in matters of business, it ought to be reconsidered. And so, after wasting half the night in copying, and tearing, and amending, the result of all my vacillations was an epistle as hard as if indited by old Broadham, or an Old Bailey counsel! I cannot understand how a fellow, so miserable as I was at that moment, could have got words together to create such a stern, savage, heartless performance. But having sealed up, as poison to *her*, the well-springs of sensibility overflowing in my heart, there was nothing left for it but to say, “Marry him, if you choose. Marry him, as most women would in your place. I once thought you different from other women. But no matter! Marry this lord. You will perjure yourself. But again, no matter! you have my consent, I fully absolve you! Marry him.”

Four days were to elapse before I could receive the answer; and what days they were! There was a rowing-match at Maidenhead, in which Barty insisted in engaging me. *He* was in the highest glee. Convinced that his letter to Mrs. Brookes would determine his sister's resolution, and that he was about to acquire a happier home at Donnington Castle than he had lost at Wrenhurst, he was in towering spirits. We dined at Maidenhead. The losing party gave the dinner, and attempted to drown their chagrin in floods of champagne; and we drove home in two drags, at night, in such a state that it was a great mercy only one of them was upset, and that nothing but the traces, the carriage, and the collar-bone of a single tender ensign, were broken.

Never shall I forget the remainder of that night! Oppressed as I was with fatigue and headache, I determined to sit up and wait the arrival of the post. I could not sleep till I had received Harriet's letter. But though it was easy to remain watching the gradual enlightening of the heavens—the transition from deep sapphire to greenish grey—dappling into the brighter tints of morn, till the full burst of the glorious effulgence of day—there was pain, amounting to agony, in the feverish sensation produced by excess and anxiety of mind; the thirst that no water would slake—the throbbing which no philosophy could tranquillise. At last I heard the step upon the stairs, the knock at the door! The letter was before me. The letter was in my hands. But they trembled so that, slight as was the seal, some minutes elapsed before I had strength to tear it open. And oh! what a heart-

breaking letter it was; heart-breaking from kindness, goodness, gentleness, generosity; one of those letters that women only can write, one of those letters that women only can feel, uncalculating, tender, noble; flowing from the heart, without the smallest interposition of the head.

In the angelic nature of such a woman as Harriet Brookes, let the white wings lie folded, compact, and undreamed of, as they may, the moment occasion requires it, the silver plumes expand, and we know that we stand in presence of a being of a higher sphere. My betrothed made no protestations that she had not entertained the intention of accepting Lord Donnington's proposals; but treated such a breach of faith as a thing too impossible to require denial. Of the worldly advantages on which I had insisted so largely and so vulgarly, she said not a syllable. Her only allusion to the consequence of Lord Donnington was by indirectly making it a pedestal to raise me in my own estimation. The few lines I had seen in her handwriting addressed to Barty, contained a simple request that he would decline the proposals of Lord D., whom both aunt and niece had referred to *him*, in order to spare themselves a fruitless renewal of importunity; and I had only the want of generosity of one who, in many things, showed himself ungenerous, to thank for all the anguish I had been undergoing. Still, my friend Brookes probably persuaded himself that, in spite of all, the Donnington match would come off at last. His peculiar mode of saying, for weeks afterwards, whenever Suffolk was alluded to—"Were I rich, poor Harriet should follow her own inclinations. Were I in Robert's place, my sister should not be forced to make a *mariage de raison*, in order to secure herself a home," convinced me that he was satisfied she would end her days at Donnington Castle.

Barty was one of little faith in feminine virtues. I have often observed this failing in men who never knew the happiness of a mother's care, and want of reverence towards the sex is as much a grace the less in a human character, as the want of loyalty in an American's. The loss of eyesight is, in my opinion, scarcely a greater disfigurement. In spite of Mrs. Stanley's fatal devotion to him, he persisted in treating her attachment as a feminine caprice; and jealousy of Lord James, who entertained the undisguised project of becoming his rival, was, I verily believe, the only thing that prevented his ingratitude from breaking bounds. One day, I literally surprised myself in the act of pleading her cause to him! For, rejoiced as I should have been to know the intimacy at an end, I dreaded the results of such harshness as he was beginning to betray. Harrassed by remorse and shrinking from the eye of her husband, I dreaded lest unkindness from *him* should stimulate poor Mrs. Stanley to some *coup de tete*, fatal to the happiness of all parties.

"Brookes is such a thorough dog in the manger!" observed Lord James one day, with his usual supercilious impertinence. "He will neither eat his slice of pineapple nor send it away. After allowing days and days to pass without showing so much as the heel of his boot at Datchet, he looks Malay kreeses at me on finding me installed in a corner of Mrs. Stanley's sofa; earning her endurance of my company by merely satisfying her that our friend Barty has been on duty, or going where glory awaited him, to the Chertsey cricket-match."

"I wish you would contrive to make her careless of his glory, and comings, and goings!" said I anxiously; "no good can possibly come of their *liaison*!"

"You think her chance would be mended, then, by attaching herself to *me*?" demanded his lordship, drawing up his shirt collar with a smile, for which, had I been poor Ethel's kinsman, I must have brained him on the spot. "Perhaps you are right! Were the worst to come to the worst, *our* elopement would create little surprise. We are an eloping family. My grandmother, you know, was the divorced Lady Deckenham; and my uncle Arthur carried off the young Marchioness of Cornwall, the prettiest woman of the regency! People would only shrug their shoulders, say it was in the blood, and trust the jury would prove merciful; whereas such things are less easily forgiven to the younger brother of a country baronet, never heard of half a mile from his lodge gate."

CHAPTER VII.

Woe!—I see the wild wind wreak
Its wrath upon thy gentle bloom;
Winter plough thy rounded cheek,
Cloud and darkness close in gloom,
Blackening over and for ever
Youth's serene and silver river.
Love alike and beauty o'er—
Lonely and belov'd no more.

Sir E. BULWER LYTTON'S *translation from SCHILLER.*

I AM free to confess that dear Harriet's decided rejection of Lord Donnington added a cubit to my stature! What I felt on the occasion it would be difficult to describe. It was a *bien être* like that of a person under the influence of opium; an exultation like that of a general who, after labouring under an imputation of cowardice, unexpectedly wins a battle. I began to amuse myself like the rest of my brother officers. Instead of moping away my days in the Belvedere Shrubbery, I accepted a day's shooting whenever or wherever I could get it; and but that the season was now too far advanced for rowing or cricket, should have belonged to all their matches. Archery, however, was just then the fashion,

a capital thing to bring a country neighbourhood together, and promote the consumption of young ladies, ham, chicken, and champagne. By entering with apparent gusto into such diversions, I was in hopes of averting the suspicions of Barty. For Harriet had distinctly apprised me that I had nothing but opposition to expect at his hands.

"He would consider it as much an act of friendship towards *you* as of justice towards myself," wrote she, "to put an end to all acquaintance between us."

But, in trying to diminish his suspicions, I contracted others of my own. The motive that attracted Barty to Chertsey and other gay haunts of the neighbourhood was unmistakeable. An heiress, who was pronounced to be *for* an heiress a charming girl, was the presiding divinity of all these parties; from residing with a quizzical uncle and aunt on the borders of Bagshot Heath. The first thing I saw of these people was their house, and frightful enough it was! White, square, and isolated as a milestone, there was not a tree on the newly-enclosed land surrounding it, higher than the furze which had been pared and burned, to make way for the new plantations. The mansion stared out at you with all its windows, as far as it could see.

"A retired haberdasher, for a thousand!" cried Lord James, when, as we were driving home from Egham on the top of a drag, we met the immodest stare of Larch Lodge.

But we two were the only men in the regiment who did not know better; and we were readily informed that old Juckeson was a man who had made a prodigious fortune in the Spice Islands; and ambitious, like most low-born men, of creating a family, had expended certain of his hundreds of thousands in the purchase of a wife having an aristocratic name, but neither beauty, merit, nor consequence. But Mrs. Juckeson, though she gave herself prodigious airs, gave none to her husband; and thus disappointed in his hopes, the old gentleman became disgusted with the fine places he had purchased of spendthrift lords in counties, where, having no root in the soil, he found his insignificance vexatiously manifest; and having built a house on ground so new that he was certain of not being twitted with the superior consequence of his predecessors, he adopted a girl whom he called his niece, and who was supposed to be his natural daughter, to inherit the millions produced (like the jolly red nose in the song) by "nutmegs and ginger, cinnamon and cloves."

Niece, daughter, or ward, Sabina Juckeson was a very striking girl:—millions of degrees inferior in attraction to my gentle Harriet, or even to the soft and sensitive Ethel Stanley, but calculated, by her bright complexion and sparkling countenance, her skill as a horse-woman when clearing hedge and ditch with the buck-hounds, and her musical talents, which were of the first order, to turn the head

of every man bearing a commission, whether cavalry or infantry, or arrayed in red coat or blue, from the barracks at Hounslow to those at Clewer! Aware that the merits of the heiress would extenuate the faults of the woman, the fair Sabina cared little what she said or did, or rather what others thought of her sayings and doings; and because certain of receiving quarter, gave none in return.

The first thing she heard of Barty Brookes, after our arrival at Windsor, was, that he was devotedly attached to Mrs. Stanley. That he was a pre-engaged man, sufficed to pique her vanity to effect a conquest. An arrant coquette, the heiress of Larch Lodge, possessing no heart of her own, had little faith in the existence of so useless an appendage; fancying that the feelings of others, like her own, were merely assumed for show, like a pair of ear-rings or a breast-pin. All that was spontaneous in her nature was sarcasm. She laughed at everything and everybody. 'The favourite objects of her pleasantry were her uncle and aunt. But sooner than want a subject for ridicule, I have heard her laugh at her very self.

"Do not flatter yourself," said she to Barty, one day in my presence, soon after I made her acquaintance, as we were walking together on the terrace at Windsor, while the old gentleman executed in the town some commissions for his wife, "do not flatter yourself, Mr. Brookes, that you will ever attain the front row, letter A, at Larch Lodge. Our family prepossessions are regulated by the strictest order of precedence. We love Lord James, because he is the son of a duke. We like your friend here (pointing to me), because he is an honourable. As to *you*, sir, who are but the brother of a baronet, and 'last and least in our dear love,' the illustrious house of Juckeson hesitates to open its arms, or wings, to enfold you."

Barty laughed heartily. He knew that Sabina cared as little for the hereditary distinctions in which she was deficient, as I for those which, unsupported by the gifts of fortune, were rather an embarrassment than otherwise.

"But even Lord James's right divine to help the turbot at my aunt's right hand, is nearly at an end," continued the gay Sabina; "for Lord Hedsor, of the Life Guards, has announced his intention of paying us a visit, and his superior precedence insures superior favour."

"Hedsor is one of the most unlicked cubs in the kingdom!" cried Barty, with an air of disgust. "Are you acquainted with him?"

"With all that the peerage can tell—sufficient for the lord-craving appetites of Larch Lodge!"

"How passing strange," said I, in pity to Barty's evident irritation, "that Mr. Juckeson, whose life has been spent in the colonies, should lay such enormous stress on mere distinctions of rank!"

"The very reason! My uncle magnifies the consequence of lords, as *I* do that of angels, as the more to be venerated for being invisible. But I do nothing to cure his disorder. Like the pomps and vanities of our ostentatious household, it is the safety-valve, that emits a thousand ill-humours. People may laugh at our gilt staircase and waggon-loads of plate; but think what it would be, were such a love of the gorgeous as my uncle's, thrown into the system! He would become bitter and bilious as a minister out of place; instead of being a good-natured, hospitable old gentleman, throwing his champagne and burgundy at everybody's head."

There was a sprinkling of good sense in Miss Juckeson's impertinence, which, as a stranger, rather amused me. But I foresaw that, with such shrewd perceptions, the suit of an heiress-hunter must fall to the ground.

It was almost a comfort to be able to reply to Mrs. Stanley, when, with quivering lips, and eyes glittering with tears, she inquired concerning the personal charms of the heiress, who appeared to engross the whole attention of Barty—

"A handsome girl, certainly;—but the last in the world to touch the heart of a man of feeling."

How well I remember the sunny smile with which she requited the intelligence! Poor soul! *Her* heart was only too deeply touched. All the commiseration I could spare to any sorrows but my own I was beginning to accord her. Earnestly as I had desired, in the first instance, to moderate her intimacy with Barty, my interposition had come so much too late, that there was as much to deplore in his sudden relinquishment of her society, as in his previous assiduities. The mischief was done—her domestic peace was destroyed. Happiness had forsaken her roof; and to the small circle in which she lived, all this was so apparent, that there was some pretext for the coldness with which the more rigidly righteous began to hold aloof from Lisbon House. Nor was the misery of the case confined to poor Mrs. Stanley. Never did I feel more shocked than on noticing, when paying a morning visit at Datchet, towards the beginning of winter, the change which a few short months had wrought in the place. The piano was closed, as though it had been never open. A pile of new books lay uncut on the table. The workbox was shut. The very pillows of the sofa were undisturbed, and the fire burnt lazily in the cedar parlour, into which I was shown, as though it were habitually uninhabited.

While awaiting there the appearance of Mrs. Stanley, the deadness of the atmosphere struck to my heart. The flowerless parterres of the garden, the little fountain, that used to glisten in the sunshine, now frost-bound and silent, were not more characteristic of the decline of the year, than that disenchanted chamber of the broken spirits of its mistress. After a delay of ten minutes, down came

a sour-looking lady's maid, to say that Mrs. Stanley, who was not very well, "hoped I would excuse her." And on my begging that I might not put her to the slightest inconvenience, and saying I would call some other time, the impertinent smile of the *soubrette* plainly implied that the ailments of her lady were megrims, scarcely worth my sympathy. As I was crossing the forecourt towards the iron-gates, Robson, the grey-headed butler, respectfully recalled me.

"Mr. Stanley was at home. His master would be glad to see me in the library."

Those last few words have always a disagreeable association for my ear; as the phrase by which, when a boy, I used to be summoned into the presence of a severe grandfather, to be reprimanded for my childish faults. I entered that of Mr. Stanley, accordingly, with something of the sensations of a culprit. No sooner in the library, than I heartily wished myself out of it. The old gentleman was far more grievously changed than the cedar parlour. His voice had become so feeble, his words so meek, his complexion was so unnaturally wan, and the years stood out so prominently from his meagre head, that I saw in a moment he had made one of those rapid strides towards the grave which are never retraced by the foot of age. The irresolute manner in which he kept shifting the papers on the table beside him, after we had taken our seats, betrayed that he was ill at ease. There was something on his mind which he evidently knew not how to bring out. We talked over the untoward state of the weather, the badness of the season for sportsmen, the absence of several leading families of the neighbourhood. But it could not be to listen to all this I was summoned back by the butler. On alluding with regret to Mrs. Stanley's health, I fancied I had touched the right chord. Even then, however, his sympathy was demonstrated by a slight cough, and a tinge of red streaking his sallow cheek.

"I have been persuading her to try Brighton," said he. "I am convinced this place does not agree with her. At this season of the year, it is damp and dull."

"And cannot you prevail on her to make the trial?"

Mr. Stanley shook his head.

"Like all invalids, she is averse to exertion. My wife maintains that home is the best place for sick people."

"I cannot fancy her really ill," said I. "At this time of year, when out-of-door pleasures are at an end, ladies are apt to find their time in the country hang a little heavy; and want of spirits is often mistaken for want of health."

"Had you seen Mrs. Stanley lately," interrupted my host, "you would perceive that her illness arises from something more than *ennui*. She is sadly altered, sadly altered! When I remember what she was last spring,—when I"—he paused, as if overcome by some inward struggle of feeling. "But our health and happiness

lie at the disposal of a will that is inscrutable!" added he, with a tremulous lip. "God's will be done!"

"At Mrs. Stanley's age, my dear sir, a few weeks' indisposition makes no very alarming impression on the constitution," said I, hoping to comfort him. "When the spring breaks again, you will see her become as strong and brilliant as ever."

Again the grey head was impressively shaken.

"When the spring breaks," said he, "it will come too late, unless her friends second my endeavours to restore her to herself. We must all try to enliven her. It is a long time since you paid us a visit. It is a long time since Mr. Brookes paid us a visit. You must bring him here with you some morning—the sooner the better."

The murder was out. The deadly paleness which converted Mr. Stanley's head into the semblance of a marble bust the moment the words were out of his mouth, convinced me of the effort it had cost him to propose what he probably regarded as the only means of saving the life, or reason, of his unhappy wife. Touching indeed was his forbearance towards that young creature.

Unwilling to mislead him by false expectations, I told him I would deliver his invitation to my friend; but that my present visit was one of adieu.—"I was about to spend my Christmas in Suffolk."

Right difficult I found it, when thus alluding to my approaching happiness, to subdue my voice and manner so as not to wound the feelings of one to whom the aspect of joy was beginning to be painful.

"On my return to Windsor," said I, on rising to take leave, "I trust to find your anxiety relieved."

"Shall you be long absent?" said he, extending his hand.

"My leave expires in February. By that time, no doubt, Mrs. Stanley will be completely restored to health."

He did not say a word. A pressure of the hand was his silent token of farewell. But never did I see a human countenance more expressive of misery than his, when endeavouring to assume a kindly smile as I quitted the room.

It was difficult for me at that moment to find compassion for any human being. The supreme happiness of seeing my Harriet again, after a year's separation, seemed to invest the whole earth with sunshine. Nevertheless, as I made my way back to Windsor, it was impossible not to feel deeply for the man whose declining years had been thus wantonly blighted for ever.

Unblinded, however, by the uxorious weakness of poor Stanley, I experienced little sympathy in the illness of his wife. My faith in the sensibility of flirting married women was not such as to inspire me with serious apprehensions on her account. I thought her far more likely to recover her health and spirits, if left to her-

self and her indulgent husband, than by renewing the visits of one who had ceased to love, and had never respected her. At all events, so certain was I that Brookes himself would derive no benefit from a renewal of the intimacy, that I determined to leave Mr. Stanley's commission unexecuted. It was more than probable he might not find courage or means to renew the invitation.

And now, gentle reader, if you have humanity enough in your heart to find pleasure in the sight of perfect happiness—a spectacle which, from the days of Milton's Satan, has been held a sore trial to the evil-minded—be pleased to accompany me in my visit to Mandevale Park. Yet I have some scruple in making the request. On paper, lovers have always appeared to me as tedious as a law-deed; and even Lovelace and St. Preux might be abridged, with advantage, of half their ecstasies. But in ecstasies neither Harriet nor myself were of a nature to indulge. Feverish as was the excitement of my mind during every mile of the journey, no sooner was I in her presence, than I felt subdued into that peaceful, happy consciousness of joy, which beings of a superior order invariably inspire. The first words addressed to me by Lord Mandevale were, however, dispiriting enough. "Welcome, a thousand welcomes, my dear Percy!" cried he. "We've got a famous party waiting for you, and expect to have twice as merry doings as last year. Lady Mandevale has a project for getting up some French plays: and we are to have the Dauntsons and Trevors next week. I'd half a mind, by the way, to write and ask young Brookes to accompany you, who is said to be a first-rate hand at that sort of thing. But, as we do not see quite so much as we used of the family at Oak Hill, I thought it might create embarrassment."

"Is there any coldness, then, between Lady Mandevale and the Brookeses?" said I.

"Why, between ourselves, *a little!* Poor Donnington, you know, is a near kinsman of my wife. And we do not consider that he was handsomely used."

"Lord Donnington?" said I, luckily recollecting in time that I had no business to know anything about the matter.

"He proposed, you know, to Miss Brookes—oh! I forgot—it was some time after you were here last year. Well! he *did* propose, as I said before; and, considering that Harriet has nothing, or next to nothing, it would have been a great match for her. *She* did not think so. There is no accounting for tastes; and, between ourselves, I sometimes fear she has set her mind upon that great lubberly fellow, William Dauntson—at least he is the only man to whom I ever saw her give encouragement. At all events, she refused poor Donnington; and in anything but a gracious manner."

"Which Lady Mandevale resents!"

"No, not exactly *that*. A woman has a right of choice; and does a kinder thing by refusing a man she doesn't like, than by

making him a repining wife. But what vexed us was that her brother kept encouraging and holding out hopes to the poor fellow, so that when Harriet spoke out firmly, the blow almost drove him out of his senses."

"But surely you ought to visit this upon Barty, rather than upon Oak Hill?"

"Oh! the coldness is quite as much on their side as ours. Perhaps they are tired of us, or perhaps they are afraid of meeting Donnington."

This was a bad beginning; but, having observed to my good-natured host that, as Lord Donnington was no cousin of mine, he must not take it amiss if I renewed my acquaintance on the morrow with the family of my friend Barty. "Of course not—of course not!" cried he. "On the contrary, you must try to enlist Harriet for our private theatricals. Perhaps now you are come, (who were always so great a favourite of the old lady!) you may contrive to persuade her to be more sociable."

Of course I promised; and, according to my announcement, lost not a moment the following day in executing my commission. Before the breakfast was quite removed, away I went, like "an arrow from a Tartar's bow," to Oak Hill! And, oh! the delight of that winter's walk!—

"The pomp of groves, and garniture of fields,"

arrayed in their vernal pride, may afford the fairest aspect of nature. But, in my heart of hearts, I own I prefer a winter landscape. A vast expanse of snow—a lake sheeted with ice—a forest, whose rimy boughs appeared enwrought in silver coral, possess a thousand charms for one whose first and only passion is associated with leafless trees, skates, sledges, and snowballs! I found the fireside at Oak Hill warm and cozy as ever; and as the old lady entertained as little suspicion as her neighbour at the Park of the real motive of her niece's refusal of Lord Donnington, she received me with open arms. By Harriet I was welcomed with less demonstration; but when I saw her pass her hands over her eyes, as she bent over her work-box during the loquacious inquiries of Mrs. Brookes concerning the pursuits and avocations of Barty, I was satisfied!

Never weary of hearing all I found it prudent to relate, the old lady chose to call in the old servant who had tended the childhood of her nephews and niece; and who, like other old nurses, persisted in calling her charge "Master Barty," and the visitor, announced to her as his brother officer, as "Captain." But though careful to talk to *them* only of his progress in his regiment, and popularity in the neighbourhood of Windsor, it grieved me sorely that I could not confide to my dear Harriet my uneasiness concerning her brother. Had she been wholly mine, I should have

persuaded her to exercise her better influence over his heart, and make her sensible of the enormity of sacrificing the whole happiness of a life, nay of many lives, merely that a rainy day might hang less heavily on his hands. His sister would have agreed with *me*, that Emmy's conduct towards him did not justify such random vengeance against the sex. But of the peculiar cause of estrangement between Barty and his sister-in-law, nothing was known at Oak Hill. In the course of the summer Harriet and her aunt paid a visit to Wrenhurst, and received the most favourable impression of the domestic happiness of Sir Robert and Lady Brookes. Their children were beautiful. Their establishment was arranged with a degree of comfort and order that would have done honour (the approving aunt observed) to older heads; and, by prudent management, the baronet had made considerable additions to his paternal estate. After hearing all which, it was impossible not to feel that, however blameable her want of candour, the Wandsworth romp had ample justification for her change of mind.

Notwithstanding my deep interest in every possible detail concerning the family which was to be eventually my own, the reader will conceive that it must have been a little tantalizing to sit watching the speaking countenance of one's plighted love; varying, from the paleness produced by deep emotion at one's entrance, to the most vivid tints and sparkling smiles. It was like witnessing a sunrise from some Alpine height. Before I had been half an hour in the room, her beautiful face acquired a thousand charms; for no toilet that coquetry and cosmetics ever devised is half so great a beautifier to a woman, as the presence of the man she loves. I tried not to fix my eyes *too* fondly on her. I endeavoured to *seem* to listen while the old lady was acquainting me with the admirable arrangements of her nephew's model farm. I did my best to forget that the graceful girl beside me, whose voice murmured like music in my ears, and whose breath almost reached my cheek, was my own—my plighted wife,—who had renounced for my sake all with which rank and fortune entrance the vanity of her sex. But never shall I forget the commotion in my heart when old Nanny made her re-appearance, with a lamentable appeal to the ladies in favour of a child belonging to a numerous family in the village, who, having met with a bad accident, was brought by its mother for their advice. I could have killed Harriet for the zeal with which she started up, and volunteered her assistance. But in matters of the medicine-chest the old lady was luckily jealous of her prerogative; and, after a thousand apologies about leaving me alone, (to which I replied by professing myself on the point of departure, and declaring that I would wait only till I heard her opinion of the poor little boy), she assured Harriet, exactly as I expected, that *her* assistance in the case was superfluous.

Away she went; and Nanny closed the door, and we were at length—(*at length!*) alone!

CHAPTER VIII.

Even when alone together, looks, no utterance can define,
Mark'd now and then soul-wanderings, that proved her half divine :
High treasure, ten times treasur'd, for not seeming wholly mine.

COVENTRY PATMORE.

THE news I had to learn from Harriet, in return for my protestations of grateful affection, were far from consolatory. The visit to Wrenhurst had been devised by her anxious aunt for the purpose of enlisting the heads of the family in the cause of Lord Donnington; and all that fraternal prudence could suggest was urged by Sir Robert in the way of warning and remonstrance. Every relation—every friend she possessed in the world, in short, was leagued against me. But, with that delicious obstinacy of her sex which, when practised by our own, we dignify with the name of firmness, the more they set before her the glories of Donnington Castle and the merits of its master, the more she steeled her heart against them all!

It would be late in the day of this grey-haired, decrepid, mossy, fossil old world, to attempt an analysis of the nature of love. But it does not remain a less incomprehensible thing to those who come into it green and young, that a feeling should arise between two persons, often at first sight, often in defiance of an utter incompatibility of circumstances, age, habits, and opinions, often without a single pretext or argument in its favour,—yet so potent in its influence as to enable them to triumph over time and tide, and human pride and human vanity, which are stronger than both. And how thoroughly does this overweening sentiment suffice for the happiness of the unhappy! The same Providence which has enriched with precious gums and exquisite flowers the most torrid and pestilential climes, seems to have taken pleasure in adorning the barren waste of life with a charm that angels might envy. Forgive me, kind reader. I will not rhapsodize again! But admit that some indulgence is due to the enthusiasm of a young soldier, re-united after a year's absence to a lovely girl whose fidelity has defied the influence of both reason and authority, and preferred an ensign's shako to the pearly coronet of a peer!

After that day, I had little difficulty in smoothing matters between Mandevale and Oak Hill. They stood too much in need of each other to be irreconcilable. The first inquiry of every guest at the Park was after that charming Miss Brookes, so much the more “charming” for being unknown to the hackneyed haunts of London, Brighton, and Cowes. Harriet was a person incapable

of wounding the self-love of any human being, (except poor Lord Donnington!) and she was consequently a general favourite. There was something almost maternal in Lady Mandevale's mode of kissing her on the forehead, by way of welcome back, the first time the Brookeses joined our dinner-party.

But, though I could discern a degree of affectionate reproach in her smile, all hope in her kinsman's favour was evidently not extinct.

Thenceforward we met daily; and what so free from suspicion as the tête-à-têtes one contrives for oneself in the midst of a large party in a country-house! The experience of the preceding Christmas had rendered me *au fait* to all the advantages of my position. I knew the exact position of doors and windows at Mandevale; and could calculate as accurately as Sir Isambart Brunel from which of the sofas in the drawing-room the conservatory was imperceptible, and what turns of the shrubbery were safe from being overlooked by the house. I managed it so expertly, that, though abiding in the same drawing-room, not once in the course of the evening did the old lady at the whist-table obtain a glimpse of her niece.

The grand question of our discussions, was whether or not to throw ourselves on the mercy of Mrs. Brookes. Harriet complained sadly of the misery and shame of duplicity towards one to whose kindness she was so deeply indebted; and, with the generous confidence of her sex, relied sufficiently on the influence of affection to plead her cause with her excellent kinswoman, who would be displeased, doubtless, and resentful for a while, but yield in time to the memory of the wretchedness to which her own life had been condemned by an ill-fated attachment. Less expansive and less confident in my nature, I thought otherwise; and, dreading the issue of some fatal interdiction that would terminate all intercourse between us, implored her to preserve our secret for the present. The sequel proved that she was right. Alas! women are the only interpreters of the hearts of their own sex!

Meanwhile, the disappointment experienced by the Mandevales in matchmaking, in the case of Harriet and Lord Donnington, had not disgusted them with the vocation. A Christmas party in a country-house would, in fact, fall flat, unless a little of that sort of thing were going on. And as they could not, without treachery to their kinsman, exercise their skill in favour of Miss Brookes, they unluckily selected myself as the victim of their matrimonial machinations. Among their guests was a rich widow—really a charming person,—a person with whom it pleased me to see my Harriet associate, and I need say no more in her favour. But as they *did* from preference associate, and I was naturally a third party in the group, it followed that those who judged me incapable

of underhand attentions to her whom they had marked out for Lady Donnington, attributed my assiduities to a secret passion for Lady Georgina Trench. What a treasure-trove was such a conceit to my friend Mandevale! From the moment the notion entered his head, he could scarcely rest in his bed for the delight of anticipating a match made up under his roof. For many years no such catastrophe had been heard of. It was not a marrying neighbourhood; and I sometimes thought he felt ashamed of having so near his gates as Oak Hill a couple of spinsters, for whom he was unable to provide appropriate mates. But by marrying me—me, a poor lieutenant in the Guards, the younger brother of a needy Irish peer, to a widow with a clear four thousand per annum and one of the prettiest places in the county, he should rub off all his disgraces. The obloquy thrown on his honour would be redeemed. His lordship's manœuvres to place us together every day at dinner, and every morning in the droschky, soon became insupportable. But that Lady Georgiana was a clear-sighted, well-bred woman, she would, perhaps, have attributed to *me* connivance in the interested projects of our friend; and though no mouther of fine phrases, it cost me as much eloquence in arraignment of the baseness of fortune-hunting, and the misery of unequal matches, as might have set up a score or two of writing-masters' copies, in order to make her comprehend that I was above taking part in Lord Mandevale's nefarious designs.

But though eager to set her right on that score, I could not (to the Mandevales and the rest of the party) signalise as strongly as I wished the indifference of my feelings towards Lady Georgiana, lest they might surmise that a man of my age could scarcely live on so intimate a footing with so charming a woman, unmoved by her attractions, unless guarded by the pre-engagement of his heart. What she herself thought on the subject I will not pretend to decide. I suspect that, as is often the case with women who have lived in the world, and tasted of the fruit of good and evil, she considered Harriet too *borné* to exercise much influence. By nature an enthusiast—an enthusiast who wrote charming verses, and painted in oils—the eternal stitchery of Oak Hill appeared to Lady Georgiana a mere waste of time, and the evidence of a limited capacity; nor could she refrain from endeavouring to incite the taste of her young friend towards higher ambitions, and pursuits more intellectual and refined. But it might not be. The gentle temper and well-regulated spirit of my Harriet were not to be disturbed from their serenity. Lady Georgiana might have as well attempted to endow the swan with the instincts of the eagle, or produce the foam and sparkle of the cataract in some level stream! Harriet was essentially a home-staying, heart-comforting, trouble-assuaging woman, born to create and enjoy a quiet household. The cultivation of her own mind for self-enjoyment, she would

have regarded as an indulgence almost criminal. The tumultuous passions and high-soaring sentiments described by the accomplished widow as the ennobling atmosphere of genius and heroism, appeared to her as ideal as the visions of an alchymist; and after sundry infructuous endeavours to elevate the aspirations of one who smiled so like an angel, and yet was of the earth, earthy, Lady Georgiana left her to herself. The enthusiast did not perceive that, while *her* spirit was soaring in the clouds, the pure mind of Harriet had attained still higher elevation, and was safe in the Heaven of heavens!

"You must help us to make up a marriage, my dear Hatty, between our friend, poor Percy, here, and the pretty widow," said Lord Mandevale, who had resumed all his former fatherly familiarity with Miss Brookes, partly from the kindness of his own nature, and partly from the conciliation of hers. "They will make charming neighbours for us, if we can get them to marry and settle at The Danes. Lady Georgy's present whimwhams about summering in Switzerland and wintering in Italy, would soon give place to good, sober, English roast-mutton ideas of domestic life, if she had only an attached, steady, agreeable husband, like Percy, to keep her company at home."

We both smiled; that is, we both tried to smile. Nay, we really accomplished the difficult feat, when his lordship set to work, with all his arithmetic, to calculate the number of acres Lady Georgiana was possessed of, and the value per acre of her land, as an inducement to me to sit by her at dinner, and suffer myself to be beat by her at billiards.

"You can't deny that she is a sweet pretty creature, Percy?" cried he, in the warmth of his zeal. "Bless you! in poor Trench's time, scarcely a man in the county but was in love with her. Poor Trench was sometimes half out of his wits for jealousy! But she has sown her wild oats *now*. She's quiet enough *now*. She's found out the real purposes of life *now*, and with her handsome fortune, and the good connections of both (to say nothing of agreeableness and popularity), you'd have the pleasantest house in the county. And I'll tell you what, Percy, my boy! If you and I were to unite in preserving the game at Braseley and Missenden, there wouldn't be such pheasant-shooting in England!"

I was half inclined to humour his weakness, by way of throwing dust in his eyes. But I knew I should lower myself in those of Harriet, by even the smallest attempt at deception.

I soon grew frightened, however, lest Lady Georgiana, instead of having *her* eyes blinded, should see straight into the truth of the case; for there is nothing like wounded vanity for quickening a woman's perceptions in such matters. The fair widow, for instance, was a tremendous musician. I use the word "tremendous" advisedly; for such sublime execution as hers always inspires me with

awe—awe, too, unmixed with any pleasanter sensation. Her natural talents had been perfected in the course of those foreign wild flyings, so much objected to by Lord Mandevale; and during a winter at Vienna, she had acquired the mastery of Beethoven's counterpoint, and learned to dash through the rhapsodies of Liszt and Thalberg, as though possessing as many hands as Briareus. A squadron of Prussian dragoons galloping up and down the piano would not have produced greater execution. Even vocal music she contrived to render disagreeable per force of perfection. The scale of Lady Georgiana's voice enabled her to take the part of Donna Anna in Don Juan, or the *Königinn von Nacht* in the *Zauberflöte*; and whenever any supremely difficult and frightful bravura was inflicted on the musical world, she was sure to get it by heart, and astonish even orchestras and professors. Such exhibitions in private life ought, in my opinion, to be put down by act of parliament! Not one person in two hundred but finds them insupportable; and when Lady Georgiana, led away by her wild enthusiasm, was indulging in her vocal or instrumental skirmishings, the country gentlemen used to look absolutely panic-struck. To bear it with more than submission was out of my power. And I admit that I often seized the opportunity afforded by the *fortissimo* in her concertos, or the *point d'orgue* upon an upper F, in her bravuras, to steal out of the room on pretence of consulting the weather-glass that hung in the vestibule adjoining the music-room. She saw me, of course; for movements of that kind are never overlooked by the person who is singing. Liszt left off playing at the royal concert at Brühl, because the Queen of England was seen to whisper. Lady Georgiana did not follow his example—I wish she *had*! But it did not escape her that I sat breathless and entranced whenever Miss Brookes, who knew nothing of music except how to make it agreeable, acceded to Lady Mandevale's request for a ballad; some old thing she had learned by ear from her aunt or old nurse, or the simple strain of some old-fashioned poet, which she had adapted to a melody of her own, and sang with a voice as small and sweet as a shepherd's pipe. She was not fond of singing before strangers. But the Mandevales were not to be refused. And as, during my visits to Oak Hill, however long and frequent, I found it pleasanter to listen to talking "far above singing," than to singing sweeter than any other kind of music, I could never manage to look otherwise than enraptured while listening at the Hall to those pure and simple notes which I never heard elsewhere.

One night, I overheard Lady Georgiana, in the blindness of her vanity, propose to give Miss Brookes some lessons in music, to enable her to accompany herself in a more scientific manner; and the country schoolmaster's offer to Charles Lamb to teach him

how to write an essay, occurring to me at the moment, an involuntary smile betrayed what was passing in my mind.

"I see now why Lord Donnington was refused;" whispered she to Harriet, as soon afterwards they took their candles at the same moment to retire to bed; "and why our friend of the Coldstream finds Mandevale Park so much pleasanter, every Christmas, than the Halls and Castles belonging to his numerous uncles and cousins. But do not be afraid, my dear! I am not going to peach! I am not going to turn aunt's evidence!" continued she, on perceiving her little friend turn as pale as death, when at that moment Mrs. Brookes approached them. "You deserve it though, Harriet, for being so close with me. When you saw me fall in love with you at first sight, and open my heart as wide as if it contained anything worth showing, you ought to have given me a hint of the truth."

"I assure you"—Harriet was beginning.

"No, don't assure me!" interrupted Lady Georgiana, "for when you assume that demure face, I do not believe a syllable that comes out of your mouth. But thank your stars, little hypocrite, that you are let off so easily! Do you remember Turenne's declaration to the young officer who had attempted to try his courage by a false alarm?—'Had you convicted me of cowardice, young man, I would have killed you on the spot!'—Believe me, if I had been betrayed into a liking for this very likeable Percy of yours—(a thing by no means unlikely—for the Mandevales have been wooing me in his behalf ever since I arrived here,) never would I have forgiven you!—Luckily the ball has only grazed the skin, and I can afford to be merciful!"

Merciful, she was. For the following day she spoke to me on the subject even more explicitly than she had done to Harriet; and as I had the grace to plead guilty at once to the soft impeachment of being desperately in love, a warm auxiliary was enlisted in our cause.

"We fairies never injure men
Who dare to tell us true!"

quoted the lovely widow, by way of rejoinder to my confidences. "Thank you for having trusted to my magnanimity. A block-head, like my cousin Lord James, (a brother officer of yours, is he not?) would have fancied he was wounding my vanity. Whereas your frank avowal of an attachment to Miss Brookes has healed the previous wound. But for *that*, your wry faces when I was singing and playing for your amusement had been vastly impertinent! But men in love are privileged to be deaf, blind, and absent; and a host of minor offences, on your part, are pardoned in favour of your disorder."

She was as good as her word in keeping our secret—nay, better. For she gave us the best advice, and promised all the aid that was

compatible with her desire not to offend such kind friends as our host and hostess, by overthrowing the hopes of their kinsman. But, like dear Harriet, she insisted on the wisdom of candour. As she truly observed, no one could compel Miss Brookes either to marry Lord Donnington, or break with me. She was of an age to exercise her own judgment and veto.

"Do not shrink from a fair examination of the state of the case," persisted Lady Georgiana, "or deceive yourselves by building castles in the air. Harriet Brookes, who does not, like your humble servant, bewilder her brains by reading Hegel and Goëthe, has no pretext for being ignorant of the exact number of shillings that are contained in a sovereign, or the exact number of butcher and bakers' bills that will be contained in a year!"

"Believe me," said I, "we have looked our prospects steadily in the face—"

"And what are they like?"

"Very like two hundred a-year on Harriet's side, and three hundred and fifty on mine! Not much more than the rent of a good opera-box!" said I, perceiving that she shrugged her shoulders.

"But you have expectations? Most people have expectations—"

"A few more hundreds a-year will come to me on the death of my grandmother,

A stepdame and a dowager,
Long withering out a young man's revenue,

though eighty years of age."

"Yes; I remember Lord Mandevale enumerating the grandmother to me, in his catalogue of your perfections!" cried her ladyship, laughing. "A thousand a-year, then, constitutes the very utmost limits of your hopes?"

"Nearly so. But is it not enough for happiness? I should sell out of the Guards to realize every guinea in my power to settle upon Harriet. And if Mrs. Brookes would consent to our residing with her at Oak Hill, we should all be the happiest people in the world."

"Of course, while the honeymoon lasted. But a thousand a-year, with a whole houseful of little Harriets and Percies, crying for bread and butter—Well, well! we will talk no more about it, just now," cried she, perceiving that I was annoyed. "But I have altered my counsels about confiding all to our aunt or appealing to Sir Robert Brookes. Time enough when you are in possession of the dowager's jointure. You will *then* be able to look the Brookes' family a little more dignifiedly in the face."

"And you literally expect," said I, "that I should go on contenting myself with a yearly meeting? You fancy I can wait till next Christmas, before I again behold all I value upon earth?"

"I dare say you would both survive it!" retorted the provoking little widow. "But I propose better things for you. Nothing would be easier for you both than a mid-summer meeting at The Danes. Leave it to *me*. I will work on the good opinion of the old lady and secure the promise of a visit. What! even six months' absence too much? Unreasonable wretch!—I have a great mind to leave your affairs to take care of themselves; or perhaps invite Lord Donnington to meet the Brookeses in your place!"

And, true to her word, I saw her that very evening propose a game of picquet to the little old lady, whom she had hitherto treated like one of the chairs or tables.

But before I had half done thanking her in my heart, my attention was suddenly startled from my own affairs by reading in the day's paper an announcement of the decease of "Harman Stanley, Esq., F.R.S. and F.A.S., of Lisbon House, in the county of Berks, aged 62, deeply regretted by a numerous circle of friends."

Dead!—poor Stanley *dead*!—leaving his beautiful wife, no doubt, sole heiress of his property! What an influence might this circumstance exercise over the fortunes of Barty! What a crisis in the life of the favourite brother of my dear Harriet! How I longed to confide to her all I knew on the subject, and all that I surmised! But I dared not. With her, it was impossible to hint at that which was so lightly treated among my habitual associates. I was even debarred from inquiring of Barty, as I could have wished, the circumstances of poor Stanley's death, and the circumstances in which it had left his widow. How was I to address him from Mandevale Hall without alluding to his sister?—And alas! to write of Harriet without writing out of the abundance of my heart, was out of the question!

CHAPTER IX.

Le ridicule cesse où commence le crime.

Ah! vous croyez, Messieurs, qu'on peut impunément,

Masquant ses vils desseins d'un air de badinage,

Attenter à la paix, au bonheur d'un ménage?

On se croit léger, on devient criminel.

La mort d'un honnête homme, est un poids éternel.

CASIMIR DELAVIGNE.

WHEN I got back to Windsor, Barty had just started, on leave Nobody seemed to know exactly whither. His letters were to be forwarded to his agent's. This was vexatious enough, for I was at once anxious to ascertain the position of his affairs, and whether there were any reasonable encouragement to confide to him the state of my own. To learn from my brother-officers what he had

been about during my absence, was out of the question. I had, in short, a hundred bad jokes to laugh at, and a hundred stupid grievances to deplore, before I could be allowed a question in return. At length I ventured the name of Lisbon House.

"What! had I not heard of old Stanley's death? Surely he must have been declining before I went away? Well, he started off in a hand gallop, and reached darkey before any one heard a word about the matter. Everybody was sorry when he went off. For Stanley was a good old fellow for a book-worm, and gave capital Madeira."

"And his wife?"

"His *widow*?—Oh, his widow," they supposed, "was like other widows, playing propriety. There was an achievement up, and the house seemed closed. Mrs. Stanley was probably gone elsewhere for change of scene."

My mind misgiving me, that her departure and that of Barty might have been simultaneous, I resolved to pursue my further inquiries on the morrow at Datchet. My next question regarded Larch Lodge; and on that point they were better informed. Every mother's son of them could prate of the whereabouts of the heiress!

"The Juckesons were gone to Brighton. The Juckesons were a sad loss. If old Juckeson had been on the spot at the time of the garrison theatricals, he would have come down with a twenty-pound note for his box."

"And the fair Sabina?"

"The fair Sabina had refused Wrottesley, of the Life Guards, and sent to the right-about Sir Claudius Hogg's eldest son, the man with the fine park at Sunning Hill; both excellent matches."

"Miss Juckeson has perhaps an attachment?" said I. And the conscious, self-complacent air with which every man present either cast down his eyes, or pulled up his shirt collar, convinced me that each believed himself to be the favoured man.

Thus left in doubt whether the mysterious absence of Barty were attributable to heiress-hunting or widow-consoling, I took care not to mention his name in my first letter to Oak Hill. There was no occasion. I had plenty of other things to write about. In the first place, I could have filled a volume with expressions of disgust at the noisy life into which I was forced to re-inaugurate myself, after the tranquil happiness and graceful refinement which had been incapacitating me for my professional duties. I suppose I shall be called spoony for the confession; but I own I have always loathed the society of my own sex. Men by themselves, and in numbers, are the greatest beasts on earth. Like trees, they require thinning out from the plantation, to acquire anything like dignity of proportion; and it is only by associating with women that the higher qualities of their nature are developed. The earthly particles require too much preponderance when fed with

nothing but cigars, brandy-and-water, and the unlicensed gossip of bachelorhood. After a few days—and, above all, a few evenings—at Windsor, I felt that I would have given my right hand to spend a single hour in listening to the voice of Harriet. Even one of Lady Georgiana's bravuras had been as the music of the spheres, compared with the fifty-times told mess anecdotes to which I was forced to give my attention.

But at the end of those few days, I was so much worse off than before, that even a rubber of whist with Lady Mandevale for partner (who never revoked less than three times in a deal), would have been a pleasant alternative. Lord James, who had been spending a week with some people near Henley, one of those ten-spare-bed sort of country-families who fill their house with produceable young men and girls, whenever there is a ball in the neighbourhood, came back to the regiment. I had long come to an understanding with myself, that he was a disagreeable fellow; a fellow who, like the monkeys, could not eat his nuts in peace without pelting other people with the shells. But one of the most important branches of military duty is to put up with the disagreeableness of one's brother-officers; and, as Lord James's barrack-room adjoined my own, we lived together on a dressing-gown-and-slipper system of intimacy, treating each other, in tones and on terms of friendship, with home-truths, in atonement of which throats have been cut ere now.

"So, Percy, my boy!" was his unceremonious salutation, the day after his arrival, "your invariable principles, it seems, have had a shake? The protestations about love in a cottage, with which you have been stunning us for this year past, all end with a long shot at the jointure of my fair cousin, Lady Georgiana Trench! What a rogue you are to what I am!"

I longed to knock him down. But as I could have done no worse had his accusation been true, I contained myself.

"May I inquire to whom you are indebted for this interesting intelligence?" said I, with a forced smile.

"To what the newspapers would call 'my own correspondent,' in Suffolk."

"Then let me tell you," said I, losing my temper, "that your own correspondent is—"

"Softly, softly," cried he, taking me by the arm, and patting me on the back, as nurses do to prevent a child from choking. "No big words, no ugly words! For my own correspondent in Suffolk is no other than my cousin Georgy herself."

"And she told you that I was making up to her?"

"Do you suppose a woman ever sits down in cold blood to disclose anything of the kind, even to her cousin the Guardsman? No, no!—she contented herself with writing me a letter (headed with, 'private and confidential,' the words being underscored till

they looked like St. Lawrence's gridiron), begging to know your character in the regiment, with a diffuseness of catechization on the subject, such as ladies use only respecting a man whom they are going to engage as coachman, or husband."

"And how do you know that Lady Georgiana has no thoughts of me in the former capacity?" said I, the moment I perceived that it was her ladyship's indiscreet zeal for the happiness of her young friend Harriet, which had exposed me to this absurd imputation.

"Because the little widow is much too fond of keeping the whip in her own hands! She tormented her late husband into a mad-house, though I admit that he gave some proof of incipient insanity by choosing her as a wife. However, if The Danes be your only resource against the Bench, and it is either a jointure or the benefit of the insolvent act, depend upon it you will meet with no opposition from *me*! I wrote her word that you were honest, sober, and cleanly, and could have an undeniable character from your last place, which you left from having a few words with the lady's maid."

"Thank you."

"Don't look so confoundedly affronted! What better are we than our brethren of the shoulder-knot?"

Les soldats, aujourd'hui, sont des valets de guerre
Qu'on habille en livrée de la couleur du roi."

"Did you acquaint Barty Brookes," said I, sauntering to the window, and looking out as earnestly into the barrack-yard as if I had never seen it before, "that Lady Georgiana had written to you for my character?"

"Not I! Barty had affairs enough of his own upon his hands, without needing to be troubled with yours."

"Before I got my leave, Larch Lodge left him very little leisure," said I. "For my part, I would as soon be tied to the tail of a meteor, as dance attendance on a finished coquette, like Miss Juckeson."

"*C'est selon!* When a man is making love to a fortune, or a jointure, he must not spare his pains."

"Brookes is gone to Brighton, then, after the Juckesons?"

"How should I know? *He* does not write me letters marked 'private and confidential,' or I would tell you. I suspect, however—mind, I only say *suspect*—that he is gone after nobody, but simply out of somebody's way."

"Mrs. Stanley?"

"*Précisément!* He probably fears that she may want to make an honest man of him."

"If still attached to him, Barty might surely do worse than marry her? Old Stanley must have died rich?"

"My dear fellow, you are sadly after time! You must have

been changing horses on the road. If you don't look a little sharper, you'll be overtaken."

"Why can't you tell me at once," said I peevishly, "how matters stand? Where is the use of making a butt of a man when there is no one by to applaud you?"

"True, O king! It is labour lost making fun of you. You are like a wild goose, hard to bring down, and worth nothing when roasted. However, as I want you to take my duty for me to-morrow, accept the little news I can bestow upon you concerning Lisbon House. The old man left to his widow only the miserable four hundred a-year jointure that he settled on her at his marriage. The rest of his fortune, about seventy or eighty thousand pounds, I fancy, will go of course to the child."

"What child? The Stanleys had no children."

"What child! You are still lower in the scale of human intelligence than I supposed you, or your courtship of Georgy must have been more serious. Why, what do you suppose was the cause of old Stanley's death?"

"How should I know?" cried I, determined not to utter a word that might implicate Barty. "Old age, an impaired constitution."

"Fiddlestick! When we first came to Windsor, he was a fine hale old soul, who could have knocked down a beefeater, and might have lived to see fourscore! I tell you he died of nothing more or less than the announcement of Mrs. Stanley's situation."

"Her situation?"

"She is to be confined early in the spring."

"I see it all now!" cried I, hoping to prevent a more explicit allusion either to the past or the future.

"Aware of the impossibility of proving the illegitimacy of the child,—aware that even his wife's avowal of her conduct would avail him nothing,—aware that, publish his dishonour as he might, nothing could prevent an infant born in wedlock from inheriting the fortune secured by settlement to his heirs,—he did the delinquents the favour of rushing out of the world and placing the bantling in enjoyment of the property the moment it sees the light."

"What a tissue of misery and guilt!" burst involuntarily from my lips.

"Say rather what a tissue of vice and folly!" cried Lord James. "Mrs. Stanley has acted like an idiot. If, instead of playing the Magdalen when no one asked her, and provoking the suspicions of the old gentleman by tearing her hair and weeping her blue eyes out, she had redoubled her attentions to him, Stanley would have become the happiest of men and fathers, instead of dying miserably and leaving her a double burthen of remorse.

Where ignorance is bliss,
'Tis folly to be wise:

but it is more than folly—it is wickedness on the part of those who curse us by enlightenment.” It was no business of mine to war with his casuistry. My thoughts just then were with the Stanleys.

Next day, the soldier who acted as Barty’s servant when he was with the regiment brought me a letter he had received from his master, begging I would have the goodness to decipher for him a few words that had been torn by the seal relative to a pointer puppy left at some dog-breaker’s:—a message of no interest and requiring no answer. But what *was* a matter of interest,—to *me* at least,—was that, although no date was affixed to the letter, the postmark was that of a small town on the borders of Yorkshire,—the post town of Wrenhurst!

Incredible!—Barty, who had so often sworn to me he would never set foot in his brother’s house,—Barty, who had for four years past wholly alienated himself from his old home,—to be there, and there as it were, *en cachette*, at a moment when most of his intimates asserted him to be with the Juckesons at Brighton! Knowledge thus surreptitiously obtained, I scarcely felt to be honestly my own; and therefore determined that, however I might hear the matter questioned, the place of Barty’s retreat should be a secret for *me*. He *must* have some strong motive for such mysterious seclusion.

Meanwhile, common charity, common decency, prompted me to proceed to Datchet, for a formal inquiry after the health of one, whom, in her more prosperous days, I had always found so hospitable.

It was a better motive than vulgar curiosity that prompted me, after receiving the usual formal answer to my inquiries after the health of Mrs. Stanley, to ask the grey-headed butler, who was nearly as much altered as his poor master at my former visit, whether Mr. Stanley had suffered much in his last illness, and whether he had been aware of his approaching end. I spoke in a very low voice, though he had advanced beyond the doorstep to address me, so that it was impossible for any one in the hall to overhear what passed between us. And yet, he kept looking nervously back as he answered me, in broken accents and with tears gathering in his eyes,—that his master had gone off rather suddenly—“though perhaps not soon *enough*,” added he, in a lower voice; “for he *did* suffer, sir, suffer very bitterly,—though too proud to show it.”

“I thought him sadly changed when I called here last,” said I. “He commissioned me to send one of my brother-officers to see him. But I scarcely thought him well enough for company.”

“Then *that* must have been two months and a fortnight ago, sir,” said the old man, musingly; “for it is just two months since we lost him; and for a fortnight before his death, he opened his

lips to no one—no, not once after—after the cause of my mistress's illness was known. And I remember, that it was one evening after you had called, and Mrs. Stanley declined seeing you, that my master sent for the doctors to her, and all came out. But God's will be done!"

"She is still *here*?" said I, interpreting his nervous whisper into a fear of being overheard.

"My mistress is here for the present. They want to move her, sir. They fancy she would be better for change of air. In *my* opinion, it would kill her at once. With a trouble such as hers upon the mind, there is nothing like letting a person indulge their grief in their own way. Whenever I see her in tears, poor lady, I am glad, for I know it comforts her."

"But Mrs. Stanley has, of course, some one with her,—some relation,—some friend?"

"If she had had friends and relations, sir, maybe she would never have *been* Mrs. Stanley," rejoined old Robson, shaking his head. "My mistress found no one to befriend her when she was a poor destitute young lady. How much less now, when she is still poor, and has so many ready to cast a stone at her! 'Tis my belief, that the great cause of her taking on so terribly (which, in her situation, may have a worse influence than she dreams of), is the feeling herself so deserted, so forgotten, so all alone in the world."

The tears that now fell unchecked from the old man's shaggy eyelids convinced me that he was talking from his heart; and from the depths of mine came the impulse prompting me to entreat he would take in my card to Mrs. Stanley, inform her that I was come to inquire after her health, and whether I could be of the smallest assistance to her.

"She will not see you, sir. Ten to one, she will not even answer your message."

"Never mind—I shall have eased my conscience by the offer."

I almost feared, from the evident reluctance of the old servant to comply with my request, that he was about to make a feint of acquiescence, and that my message would never reach its destination. During the few minutes I remained awaiting him on the chilly doorsteps, convinced that he had proceeded no further than the oaken passage, I was making up my mind to address the same courtesies to Mrs. Stanley, by letter, on my return to the barracks; when, lo! just as I had fixed my listless eyes on the golden circle of crocuses, which seemed to shed factitious sunshine on the old-fashioned court, old Robson re-appeared,—his face shining almost as bright as the crocuses.

"She *will* see you, sir! My mistress *will* see you! I never should have thought it! After she had paused a minute over your card and message, as if not thoroughly comprehending, she suddenly started up, and bade me fetch you in."

"Perhaps it would be as well," said I, "if I left her a few minutes' leisure to recover herself, for the effort of seeing a stranger?"

"Not by no means in the world, sir!" replied the old man. "If she thought twice about it, may be she'd change her mind, either thinking folks might talk about the visit, or that she was not equal to the exertion. But well do I remember, sir, the first day as ever you came into this house, how much my poor master was taken with you, and how different he thought you from others, who were greater favourites; and how grieved he was the day he found out you were going on leave of absence. 'Another friend deserting me in my need!' said he, as he undressed that night. 'Somehow or other, I felt that young man to be almost a friend!'"

These touching reminiscences were not exactly calculated to raise my spirits, as a preliminary to the trying interview that awaited me; and I was almost choked by the pain in my throat, as I made my way on tiptoe, as if poor Stanley were still lying dead in the house, along that gloomy old corridor. Let the reader despise me as he may, but, I swear I had hardly courage to enter the cedar parlour, into which I was motioned by the agitated old man.

I expected to hear the sound of sobs—I expected to find Mrs. Stanley in tears—I was prepared for the painful excitement of a *scene*. Yet, though a surprise, it was no relief to my feelings to perceive her seated precisely in her wonted place, as if she had been led there by her attendant, and wanted strength to leave it. For she had no visible occupation. There were no books near her.—no working or writing materials. She raised her eyes vacantly from the carpet when I entered; fixing them upon me for a moment, as if trying to understand the purpose of my being there; and then, with the same dull vacuity of countenance, pointed to a vacant chair. As to tears, she looked as though her eyes were as unsusceptible of that grateful moisture, as the burning sands of the desert of evening dew. The widow's weeds in which she was attired had evidently been assumed with the same mechanical submission as the seat she was placed in. Poor creature,—poor Ethel!—She had ceased to hope,—she had ceased to *wish*,—except that God would please to shorten her days of probation. Let my readers call to mind the attenuated delicacy of feature of Canova's Magdalen,—the feeble, hopeless, self-abandonment of its countenance and attitude,—and they will see the poor widow quite as clearly as I was able to discern her through my blinding tears.

"You expressed a wish to see me," said she, at last, in a voice from which all tone and accent were extracted, so that it was as a voice from the dead.

"I was desirous of assuring you in person, my dear Mrs. Stan-

ley," said I, bending towards her, and speaking nearly as low as herself, for she appeared too meek and fragile to be addressed like other people, "that if it were in my power to save you any trouble or inconvenience, by officiating on any occasion in your behalf—"

She gently raised her feeble hands and clasped them together, while uttering a few inarticulate words, but not as if wishing to interrupt me.

"Believe me," I therefore resumed, "it would afford me the sincerest satisfaction to be of service or comfort to one in whose situation I so deeply sympathize."

"Did he send you to me?" said she, in the same half-articulate murmur; and, blockhead that I was, I was on the point of asking to whom she alluded. Another moment, and I understood her.

"I have not seen him these two months—not since I had the pleasure of seeing yourself," said I.

"I thought, perhaps, you came from *him*!" exclaimed the poor creature, with a look of ghastly disappointment, which I shall never forget. "I know he ought not to send to me.—I know he ought not to come to me;—that in *this* house a meeting between us would be sacrilege;—that there is not a spot on earth so far from my husband's grave as to admit of my holding his hand again in mine.—Still, it is *very* terrible to feel oneself quite forgotten, quite alone, with such memories as mine, with such prospects as mine!—I dare not quit this house, because elsewhere than in its quiet seclusion I might be seen and pointed at, and so want courage to bear out till the end. But you know not what it is to remain here. You know not what it is, in the hush of night, to fancy you hear voices—still, small voices, accusing you; and the shadows of those you love—that is, those you *once* loved,—for I love nothing, *nothing* now,—gliding betwixt you and the wall. This house was never a cheerful one," continued she, with a grievous smile. "But you cannot guess what it is now that I have peopled it with such terrible recollections."

"Indeed, dear Mrs. Stanley, you ought to quit the place!" pleaded I. "Your health, your reason will give way under such perpetual excitement."

Poor Ethel shook her head mournfully, by way of reply.

"You are not in a natural state of body or mind," continued I; "and, so far from remaining in this gloomy spot, you want change of air,—you want change of scene."

"I want nothing,—*nothing* but rest,—and rest I shall soon have," rejoined the widow. "I have been unconsciously nursing a hope, which vanishes as I listen to your quiet words, that, being so near him, he would at least take some measure to assure me that my sufferings and shame were not a matter of indifference to him. But now that even that last expectation has left me—"

There was such a deep despondency in her face, that I stupidly

fancied I should be lessening the influence of Barty's ungrateful neglect, by apprising her of his absence.

"Mr. Brookes is not at Windsor," said I; "nor will he be here again for weeks."

"And where, then, is he gone?"

"He left no address. His letters are forwarded to his agent's."

"He left no address?" cried she, justly interpreting this into a precaution lest she should molest him with letters. "But *somebody* must know where he is?" she continued, rousing herself from the reverie into which for a moment she had fallen. "Selfish as he is, he has friends. You yourself are his friend. Tell me therefore honestly, is he at Brighton with those people,—those people by whose fortune he was so shamefully dazzled,—those people who were the cause of all my distraction?"

"The Juckesons?—certainly not!"

"Heaven be thanked!—*That* is really beyond my hopes. But if you know so positively that he is not there, you must surmise where he is. Do not fancy I wish to know it for any blameable purpose. I am not going to address him. I am not about to trouble him further. He will have no care or molestation on *my* account. But I want to be sure exactly *where*, when the worst is over for me, an intimation of it might reach him, and satisfy his mind that he will be annoyed no more on my account."

Her face became slightly convulsed, and I was in hopes she was going to experience the relief of tears. I was mistaken. Her lips quivered, and she closed her eyes for a moment. But it was only in the effort to subdue the anguish of some inward pang.

"If you will give me leave, dear Mrs. Stanley," said I, fearing the interview was becoming too much for her strength, "I will make inquiries on the subject that interests you, and to-morrow let you know the result."

Not that I had any intention of lending my aid towards a reconciliation between her and Barty; not that I was not fully aware of his being lost to her for ever; but the fragility of her state rendered it necessary to temporize.

"Suffer me to ring for your female attendant before I leave you," said I, perceiving that she had laid down her heavy head on the table near which she was sitting, as if unable to support herself. And having hastily rung the bell, I took her unresisting hand between mine, and mingled with a thousand endearing words of consolation my repeated assurances that I would return the following day.

"I am afraid, sir, you found her worse than you expected," said Robson, who, as he guided me across the damp, chill hall, noted the depression of my feelings.

"Never was human being more heart-broken!" said I.

"And yet, sir," rejoined the old man, in a still closer whisper,

"as yet, my poor, dear lady does not know the worst that is awaiting her. They are afraid of telling her. The doctors say that if she were to obtain an inkling of the contents of the will, they would not answer for the consequences. I heard them tell the executors so, when they wanted to remove her from the house."

"I do not believe pecuniary troubles would increase her sufferings!" said I, as I quitted the house. But I could not forbear adding my secret prayer to poor Robson's parting ejaculation that—"God would temper the wind to the shorn lamb!" Save in Divine mercy, what hope for her *now*!

CHAPTER X.

Dis moi, que je m'égare,
 Dis qu'il veut m'éprouver, mais qu'il n'est point barbare.
 Dis qu'il va revenir,—qu'il revient;—trompe moi,—
 Mais obtiens qu'il me trompe à son tour, comme toi.
 Va le lui demander,—va l'implorer!—Demeure,
 L'orgueil est entre nous,—il glace,—il est mortel!—
 Je sens qu'il me fuit, et qu'il faut que je meure.

DESBORDES-VALMORES.

I SHALL be blamed by many of my readers, but I trust forgiven by a few, when I admit that, the following day, I despatched to Wrenhurst Park a full, true, and particular account of all I had witnessed.

"Much as I applaud the principle," said I, "which doubtless prompted you to break off a connection already productive of such fatal results, I should not be justified if I allowed you to remain in ignorance of the state of mind of this unhappy sufferer. What would be your remorse were she to fall a sacrifice to her despair at being thus abruptly shaken off?"

After the letter was despatched I felt easier; though my mind misgave me that Barty would evade the dilemma by returning no answer, as though it had never reached his hand.

But, alas! the corroding influence of money-love, and the total subjection of his nature to the worship of the molten calf, had converted my friend Barty into a fine, gay, bold-faced villain; and, so far from shrinking from the correspondence, he wrote by return of post to apprise me that he was at a loss to conceive what part I considered myself privileged to act in the business?

"As regards the lady whom you call (as ladies are apt to be called in tribulations extending through three volumes octavo,) a 'much injured victim,' I can only say that she resembles the rest of her sex; ever ready to bring down mountains toppling on their heads, but to shriek and bewail themselves all the time they are falling. I shall cease even to pity her, seeing that she has engaged

so doughty a champion as yourself; if indeed she ever deserved aught but congratulation on her riddance from a peevish, narrow-minded, old tyrant, who, if a monster for making her his wife, has at least made justifiable atonement by making her his widow. Has Mrs. Stanley already forgotten what a bore she used to think him? I shall be back at Windsor (as the adjutant might have informed you) by the 10th of April, when I hope to hear a better report of the sick room; for it is plain you have taken out your diploma, and are officiating as a dispenser of juleps. May you live to be knighted, and the shadows of your fair patients never be less!

"I find Wrenhurst prodigiously improved. Lady Brookes has turned out a housewife of indefatigable activity, without an idea or ambition beyond her park paling; so you see that she understood her vocation far better than I did. My brother meanwhile has progressed into a fox-hunting squire—good for nothing but to squeeze his tenants and his wife, and leave an improved estate and a marble monument to the parish. The only works of the day 'ordered to lie on the table' at Wrenhurst, are 'The Muck Manual' and 'The Farm'—*chef-d'œuvres* by which John Murray and Blackwood endeavour to atone to the world of materialism which has succeeded to the world of letters, for the sin of having enriched our literature with Adam Blair and Don Juan.

"In short, my dear Percy, the positive, in its most solid sense, is the leading influence of the whole family of Brookes; and if you find yourself in vein poetic, just now, I strongly recommend you to address yourself elsewhere."

How I longed to reply as it deserved to this coarse epistle! But to provoke a paper-war with the brother of Harriet, was a thing that required more courage than half a dozen duels. Better meet his flighty impertinence with silent contempt; and soothe by palliatives the suspense of Mrs. Stanley, till the arrival of the 10th of April, now at a little more than three weeks' distance.

During that period I often visited her—bringing tidings of, though no message from, the absent one.

I even prevailed upon her, one morning, when the sun shone as bright as if the spring, like a gay girl on the eve of her *début*, were impatient to make its appearance, to descend, resting upon my arm, the flight of steps leading from the cedar parlour to the little garden.

Poor Mrs. Stanley leaned heavily, *very* heavily on my arm; for two months more, and she was to be a mother. But before she could accomplish a second turn of the smooth-rolled, formal gravel-walk, so polished and level that one saw there was no longer a foot remaining to pace its dreary solitude, she became so faint that I was the first to propose returning to the house. After all, she judged rightly in secluding herself. Scarcely a fresh object on which she could rest her eye, or a familiar spot to which she could repair, but was fraught with torturing accusations.

My chief comfort after my dispiriting visits to this unhappy woman arose from the thankful eye with which the old butler conducted me across the cheerless hall. Poor Robson seemed grateful to any one that prevented his lady being left wholly to herself. So young, yet so unhappy!—So young, yet so hopeless!—What a destiny!

Four days before the expiration of the long leave, I was dining at mess after sitting half the morning at Datchet, where, without explicit allusion on either side to Barty's approaching return, both of us were under the happy influence of the hopes which it created—I, because I had made up my mind to a full explanation with him on the subject of my pretensions to his sister's hand; poor Ethel, because, though they were to meet no more, to know that he was near her was a comfort for such misery as hers; when, lo! much to my surprise, Lord James bade us fill our glasses to the health of "the new ensign."

"What new ensign?" There was no vacancy in the regiment.

"My cousin, Sir Henry Axholm, will join us next week," said he. "As senior ensign, I, of course, get the lieutenancy."

"But *what* ensigncy—*what* lieutenancy are you talking of?" was the general cry; most of us being convinced that he was only amusing himself at our expense, by one of his idle mystifications.

"Brookes will be gazetted out to-morrow," said he, perceiving that, unless he condescended to be more circumstantial, no one would believe him. "As he corresponds, I fancy, with one or two of you, I concluded you were in the secret as well as myself."

Exclamations of wonder now became general. Some were only surprised, some angry, some hurt.

"And so Barty is going out of the army?" inquired one of the older hands. "A deuced stupid thing of him, to throw himself out of his profession! Barty would have made a smart officer in time."

"He takes a half-pay lieutenancy, I fancy, in some regiment of the line, as an excuse for wearing a red coat at foreign courts," replied Lord James. "But I conclude he has done with soldiering as a profession."

"Then what is going to become of him?"

"Nay, you must ask Percy, there, who is more in his confidence than I am; though he sits looking as glum as though unaware, when Barty quitted us, that he never intended to join again."

"I was not with the regiment when Brookes quitted you," said I, drily, for I was, in truth, bitterly mortified.

"But you were in constant correspondence with him, and are so now, I presume; for it is not long since I saw a letter addressed to you in his handwriting. No matter!—I don't ask you for his secrets—I leave that to Holliwell, and the rest of them. I have got his lieutenancy, which is enough for *my* purpose!"

And forthwith the conversation turned upon the new ensign. How old was he—how tall—how rich? How long had he left Eton? Was he fast or slow?"

"Again, I beg to refer you to other people," replied Lord James: "I always leave my relations to be abused by my friends. If you want Harry Axholm's character, write over to the Life Guards. Willscourt and Arthur Bruce were at Chaplin's with him, and can tell you more about him than I can, who have never seen him since he was an urchin riding cockhorse on my grandfather's cane."

How glad I was to escape their noisy nonsense! Yet no sooner was I alone than I longed to be back in the messroom, to get rid of my own thoughts. What *could* I say to her! How was she to bear this wholly unexpected blow! Within so short a time of her confinement, the shock might prove fatal. All I hoped was, to keep it from her for a time. No newspaper ever reached the presence of Mrs. Stanley. She saw only a faithful old nurse, who had never quitted her since her marriage, and the grey-headed butler, both of whom would have cut their tongues out ere they made the slightest allusion to Mr. Brookes. There was consequently some chance that the delusive hopes which had so long comforted her soul, might still, though more than ever delusive, continue to support her.

I now began to discover that, while deceiving *her*, I had also been deceiving myself; flattering myself that mere humanity induced me to devote myself to this deserted sufferer, whereas I had found a selfish pleasure in her company. Mrs. Stanley was the only living being to whom I could talk of Harriet, talk of her as she deserved to be talked of; for that the object of my affections bore the name of Brookes sufficed to secure the sympathy of the unhappy Ethel. By degrees, she almost persuaded me that it was to please *her* I entered into such profuse details concerning Oak Hill; the nipped-in-the-bud romance of the quiet little maiden aunt, and the pure and lady-like simplicity of the unworldly niece. Even the colour of her eyes, even the tinge of her hair, possessed interest for one to whom they recalled the eyes and hair of a person whom she was never to see again, and whom she knew that it behoved her to forget. In this reciprocity of feeling consisted half our mutual good-will; each being to the other a link to the real object of our affections. Mrs. Stanley's sudden removal from Datchet would have deprived me of my only confidante, if the name of confidante can be applied to a person to whom nothing was confided; and when the Gazette of the following evening confirmed Lord James's report, I trembled for *her* with deepfelt fears; but a little, I admit, for myself.

Barty's prospects were sure to be pretty freely canvassed at mess. But it was no longer to me, it was to Lord James, that the youngsters addressed themselves for information.

"What the deuce is Master Barty going to do with himself?" said one of the junior ensigns. "He can't have stripped off his red coat to change it for a black one, as Tom Trevor did; for the Brookeses have no preferment to give away. They are my own county people, and I know they have neither church patronage nor borough interest. I remember the thing being canvassed at my father's, when there was a talk of Sir Robert's standing for the county."

"If he have no *pis aller* of that kind in prospect, and the Juckesons don't come down handsomely, the loving couple must starve!" added the son of an opulent East India director, who looked upon anything short of turtle and venison as starvation.

"And thurely I've heard that Brookth had only a mithewable five thouthand pounds left him by hith father?" added little Harry Gilman, better known in the regiment as the ringtailed Macauca.

"That's *it*!" cried Lord James. "It is because he has got only five thousand pounds that he is wise enough to leave the regiment. Five thousand pounds will never push him on. His old godfather, who gave him his commission, did not leave him a guinea; and five thousand pounds is only a genteel sort of beggary for a fellow with pretensions to live in the world; to which Barty, with *his* person and popularity, naturally aspires."

"But how is going out of the Guards to make him richer?" pleaded the city scion. "He could have lived as cheap with his regiment as anywhere else?"

"Perhaps he wanted to realize. Perhaps he has made up his mind to be a man, or a mouse. Old Broadham, his quondam guardian (with whom, by the way, he spent a week or ten days before he proceeded into Yorkshire), could easily give him a slice of a good thing now and then, by which his little capital might be doubled."

"Oh, Barty is going to speculate, eh?" cried the others, jumping at once at a conclusion. "I wish him joy! In that case, he may have to figure a second time in the Gazette. I wish him joy!—I wish him joy!"

"Perhaps you think that, as he always dearly loved the chink of the coin, he is going to be old Broadham's cashier?" cried Lord James, amused to find their interest so strongly excited. "No, no! I fancy Barty's speculations are on a grander scale. Depend upon it, all these visits to my guardian, and visits to my brother, and getting his little capital within a ring-fence by selling-out, are indications of a consummation no less devoutly to be wished than a marriage settlement."

"Thothe horrid Juckthonth! Barty ith going to be thpithed and thplithed!" ejaculated little Harry Gilman.

"I know nothing about spiced or spliced!" retorted Lord James. "All I can tell you is, that Barty ordered his purchase-money to be booked up at old Broadham's Lombard-street concern; and

that he was in a deuce of a hurry to get his traps booked off from hence to ——— But enough, and more than enough," cried he, catching sight of my face, and perceiving how intently I was listening. "Barty is no longer one of *us*; and we have no right to render his comings and goings as notorious as if advertised in the *Hue and Cry*."

"Whereheth the good of hith making a myhttewy about it?" whispered little Gilman, aside, to me. "Everybody knowth that old Broadham ith over head and earth in railroadth. I darethay he hath bamboothled poor Barty into hatharding hith little all in thome tottewing conthern."

All this was more than vexatious. Deeply mortified on my own account, deeply anxious on Barty's, I was grieved, even to consternation, by the prospects of Ethel.

"I am sure you bring me good news to-day!" said she, when, the following afternoon, I arrived at Datchet a trifle earlier than my wont; conscious that, in spite of my endeavours to look unmoved, a burning flush was patching my cheeks with shame. "'Beautiful are the feet of the bringers of good tidings!'" continued she. "I was watching for you from my chamber-window, and could see, as you crossed the courtyard, that your footsteps were those of a pre-occupied mind."

"I was thinking," said I, conscious of the necessity of imparting strength to her enfeebled frame, "that the weather being so favourable this morning, you might be induced to get into the carriage, and extend your airing as far as the park."

An involuntary shudder pervaded her frame at the proposal; for, since poor Stanley's death, she had never entered the carriage. It had, however, been left her, as an act of humanity by the executors, in consideration of her infirm health; for till the end of a year they were not forced to alter the arrangements of the Datchet establishment.

It seemed, however, to occur to her, on second thoughts, that I must have some ulterior motive for a proposal so unusual. Perhaps *he* was come. Perhaps I had made such arrangements with my friend, that, in the course of the drive, she should be seen by him unseen! The very thought brought to her wan cheeks a glow almost rivalling my own; and, ringing the bell abruptly, she desired the horses might be put to. Unprepared for such an order, difficulties of course arose. But she overmastered them all. She resumed her voice of authority, her energy, her good sense. Within an hour, I had assisted her into the carriage, and bidden the coachman proceed to Bishopsgate.

But the time that had elapsed in preparation had caused the beauty of that lovely spring day to evaporate before we reached the park. The sunshine was gone; the plantations had resumed their cold, leafless aspect; the birds had ceased to sing. And her

dispirited and shuddering recognition of the well-known objects that met her eye, caused me almost to regret the success of my proposition.

Fortunately, a glimpse of a distant riding-party, which contained several officers of the Guards and Life-guards, imparted a momentary interest to the scene. One of them reined up his horse for a moment, and tarried behind the rest, as if looking towards us; and as we were, luckily, at too great a distance for her to perceive that it was only little Harry Gilman, I saw by her change of colour that she fancied the object of her drive was accomplished.

Before we parted, she proposed, of her own accord, that on the day after the morrow we should drive again. And on occasion of this second drive, we were fortunate in one of those summer-like days of spring, when you seem to see the grass rise and the leaves expand under the genial glow. The breath of Heaven was propitious.

"Your friend has brought sunshine with him," said the poor infatuated creature, with a confiding smile.

Scarcely a day now passed but we either walked round the paddock opening from her little garden, or took a gentle airing in Windsor Park or forest. That we were seen by several of my brother-officers, was inevitable; and that they found my *tete-à-tete* with the widow exceedingly diverting, was of course equally true. But though convinced that, through Lord James, my *dévouement* would reach the ears of Barty, I submitted; so satisfied was I of my own motives in the compassionate act. Moreover, I had the consolation of perceiving such wonderful improvement in the aspect and health of Mrs. Stanley, that the sweetness of the first May morning, with its breath of hawthorns, "tune of birds, and lapse of streams," produced almost as much effect on my own feelings as upon hers. I was beginning to suspect that, after all, this world might be a spot assigned us to be happy.

I know not whether she were disappointed that Barty did not show himself more openly; or gratified that he should submit thus implicitly to the determination she had expressed in the first trying moments of her widowhood, never to see his face again. Perhaps she expected, day after day, as she quitted the house, that chance would favour their meeting. For, day after day, she grew more anxious for her drive. Unwilling to go alone, from a sort of nervous dread of she knew not what, she was almost peevish when my turn of duty rendered it impossible for me to bear her company.

One afternoon—a cheerful, glowing afternoon, early in May, as I entered the iron gates, I saw old Robson standing on the huge stone door-steps, on which the gardener had been placing, that morning, the hardier of the greenhouse plants. His poor old wrinkled, care-crazed face was beaming with smiles; smiles of

more significance than regarded the mere auspiciousness of the weather, or the restoration of his favourite old myrtles and geraniums.

Yes! "His mistress was safe! She was the mother of a boy. God had been with her. Her pangs had been mercifully sustained. She was asleep. The doctor had left the house. No one was in the nursery but old Mary and the nurse. Would I like to see the child?"

The nursery!—a nursery at Lisbon House! No! I had no curiosity to see the child. I trusted the sight of it might comfort *her*. It could not comfort *me*. I dreaded to discern in its infant features an accusing resemblance, reminding me of its affinity to one I loved. Poor child of wrath! Heaven send it might be come to restore peace and health to its mother!

CHAPTER XI.

Nos fautes ne sont pas toujours immédiatement punies. Afin de nous rendre le châtimement plus sensible, Dieu nous fait échouer dans quelque entreprise raisonnable, et nous livre à l'injustice des hommes.

CHATEAUBRIAND.

I BELIEVE I have already admitted that my letters to Oak Hill abstained from all allusion to my intimacy with Mrs. Stanley. In the first place, I felt a natural repugnance to advert, even remotely, to a secret so unfit for the participation of a being so chaste as Harriet; more particularly as not a letter I ever addressed her but ran the risk of falling into the hands of Mrs. Brookes; the very woman to have resented a confidence of such a nature, almost more than my clandestine engagement to her niece. In the next place, it was impossible to allude to Datchet and its sorrows, without describing the conduct of Barty in terms I should not have forgiven myself for using to his sister. I could not, however, on the great day, resist my inclination to address a letter to the sharer of all my joys and sorrows (with whom, as is usually the case in such absences, my correspondence had of late insensibly slackened), telling her how happy I felt, and that, some day or other, I would communicate to her the origin of my joy; but that at present she must congratulate me on the accomplishment of one of my earnest wishes, without inquiring why or wherefore. The letter had not been long in the post, before I half repented my communicative vein.

"And when do you give us caudle, eh, Percy?" inquired Lord James, the following day at mess.

"I hope you intend to invite us to the christening?" added the city ensign. "I have had immense practice in that way among my country cousins; and am quite qualified to act as proxy, if

the sponsors and their apostle spoons should not be forthcoming."

I replied fractiously, for on this sacred subject I could not stand being quizzed; and was of course forced to pay the penalty of my ill humour. Nothing that could be devised was spared me in the way of allusion to my nursery propensities. The birth of this unfortunate babe was made the subject of such biting jests, that I saw it was not Barty who was supposed to feel a paternal interest in the event.

It was in vain I protested,—in vain I resented,—in vain I threatened. Lord James, or some other equally mischievous person, had been at the pains of creating an impression that my humane visits to Datchet were the result of a warm and fortunate attachment.

"I have half a mind to write word to Barty Brookes how well you look in his old clothes!" said his lordship, in a tone of the most provoking sarcasm. "I have got a half-written letter to him in my desk; and will add to my congratulations on his marriage my congratulations on having so sad an incumbrance taken off his hands."

"His marriage?" cried I, too much startled by *that* announcement to heed the offence conveyed in the other.

"By this time, poor fellow, I suppose he must be turned off. His family have behaved amazingly well to him. On finding old Juckeson disposed to double whatever Barty could lay down, the cubbish baronet forked out handsomely; and even a maiden aunt he has got, somewhere in the Eastern counties, produced a few scurvy thousands from the savings' bank. Between these gratuities, his commission, and patrimony, Barty contrived to scrape together a capital of sixteen thousand pounds. Upon which Cloves and Cinnamon, who, believing he had only five, had promised twice as much to his niece, was forced to produce two-and-thirty. And so, by fair means or foul, Barty has become a Man of Capital. And Barty will be a happy man. Barty would have sold his own brother into slavery, like Joseph's brethren, if he could have secured a long price for him."

For some time past, the mystery with which I was forced to envelope my intimacy at Datchet, as regarded Harriet, had been pain and grief to me. Concealment of any kind betwixt me and my plighted love was insupportable. I felt that every thought, every feeling, every look, every word of mine in which she had not her share, was on *my* part a crime. Never, however, had this consciousness weighed upon me so heavily as now that the safety of poor Mrs. Stanley and the comfort she took in her child inspired me with feelings that I longed to pour into the heart of Harriet. To withhold from her my anxiety and indignation, had been comparatively easy. But I could not forgive myself an unparticipated emotion of joy.

For as soon as Mrs. Stanley could sit up, I was admitted to her presence ; that is, not *admitted*, but besought to pay her a visit ;—that I might behold this treasure—this little one—this pearl of price, bestowed on one whom all the world had abandoned.

“Too much happiness—too much, too much for one like *me* !” —was her faint ejaculation, when first the babe was laid upon her aching bosom. “In my youth, when good and blameless, I had not a single relative to love me. My blood ran not in the veins of any living thing. If unhappy, there was no one to feel for me. If I had died, there was no one to mourn. And now—now that I have rendered myself an outcast—now that I ought to shrink from looking people in the face, this blessing is vouchsafed me,—this fair and sinless creature, that will love me whatever my faults !”

These touching words were repeated to me by old Mary, when first, with tears in her eyes, she gave me an account of her lady's progress and the beauty of her little nursling ; and I was consequently prepared, in obeying her invitation the very day Mrs. Stanley was moved into her dressing-room, to find her in a state of enthusiastic exaltation of mind. She received me with tears—actually with tears ; and besought my blessing for her child as though she thought it, more than other children, in need of the protection of Heaven. Poor soul ; there was something painful in the way she lay looking at it, and the fervour with which she pressed her trembling lips to its little brow,—its tiny hand—*nay*, even to the hem of the garment. The kiss which, in my turn, I bestowed upon the babe, was inspired, however, by feelings in which Mrs. Stanley had little share. I traced, or fancied I could trace in its tiny features some vestige of the Brookes countenance—a something of Harriet, which searched into the very depths of my heart.

“I feel so ashamed *now*,” faltered the happy mother, fancying she could perceive by this tender embrace of her child that my friendship towards her was unchanged, “I feel so ashamed *now* of all I said to you a few weeks ago of my disgust and weariness of life. I had not *then* heard the cry of this little creature ! I did not *then* know what it was to have something belonging to one, something of one's own, that one can clasp to one's heart, without fear of coldness, or mockery, or ingratitude ! Oh ! I know better now than to say I am sick of life !”

The gentle bloom that tinged her cheek from the exertion of speaking, the slight moisture that trembled in her violet-coloured eyes, the fond, fond smile, that hovered upon her lips, endowing her countenance that moment with almost superhuman beauty. I have seen just such faces, in pictures by the old masters, concentrating all the holiness and joy of mother-love into the face of an enraptured madona, leaning over the babe of grace.

“You never deserted me in my misery, and God will bless you

for it!" said she, "for to comfort the unhappy is, indeed, a Christian act. But you must not desert me, either, in my present great joy; for I sometimes think my heart will break with the fulness of its love, and your company will inspire me with the serenity of which I stand so much in need. You will be godfather to my poor babe—will you not? You will give it your name at the baptismal font? That of your friend would excite too many surmises, too many comments; and it would be a shameful mockery to assign it that of my husband."

"But since, under any circumstances, it must bear that of Stanley—"

"Yes, legally! but by no act or deed of mine. Had I my own will, it should be otherwise; nor will I be guilty of the deliberate treachery of giving it Mr. Stanley's Christian name."

"Name it Percy, then, with all my heart!" cried I. "As your sincere and attached friend, there will be nothing surprising in my becoming its sponsor."

And from the eagerness with which she thanked me for what *she* called a concession, I saw it was passing in her mind, that, had the circumstances been different, as the bosom friend of Barty I should naturally have become godfather to the first-born of his wedded love.

She seemed over-anxious that it should be baptized. "It was doubly in want of the waters of purification!" And ere I quitted her, it was settled between us that, on the last day of the month of her confinement, I should come, accompanied by the curate of Old Windsor (an intimate friend of mine), for the solemnization of the sacred rite.

"And the godmother?"

"The godmother is my faithful old Mary, if you will not be offended at finding yourself joined with her on the occasion!" replied Mrs. Stanley.

Cheerfully did I accept my companion in office. But I could not help feeling how eagerly, had she been aware of the circumstances, my kind-hearted Harriet would have accepted the sponsorship of the helpless little one, upon whom its fellow-creatures were so ready to vent their scorn on the threshold of life.

I was left just then to enjoy my summer rambles pretty nearly as I listed. Lord James was off, on leave, for a fortnight's enjoyment of the London season; and the mess profited by his absence to wreak on his raw cousin, Sir Henry Axholm, all the spites created by the sauciness of one who might have taken out a patent for being impertinent. For some time past, they had abandoned *me* to my devices; for a person undisguisedly pre-engrossed, ceases to be available to his companions, even as a butt. My thoughts were too much distracted between Oak Hill and Datchet, to admit of perceiving even when I was laughed at.

That my cares were divided was, strange to tell, a relief. But for the critical state of things at Lisbon House, and my dread lest the premature discovery of Barty's marriage should complete the mischief he had wrought, I should have experienced far greater uneasiness at a sort of constraint which I began to perceive, or fancied I could perceive, in the letters of Harriet. She certainly did not write as she used. Was I to infer from this that she did not *feel* as she used? I was beset by vague apprehensions that her brother's renewed intercourse with his family boded little good to my cause. Gold had eaten into his soul, till his ruling passion superseded even the claims of friendship. It would have been out of his present nature not to advocate the pretensions of Lord Donnington; and the munificent donation made him on occasion of his worldly-wise match, by his maiden aunt, who had always declared her fortune pledged to the niece to whom, from her birth, she had acted the part of a mother, inspired me with some misgivings that Mrs. Brookes would not have alienated from Harriet what she had taught her to regard as hers, but for the conviction that she was about to form a match too brilliant to admit of so small a portion being acceptable. The *aunt's* convictions, however, would have signified little, had they not been seconded by the growing reserve of the niece. Like other nervous people, I was *afraid* of verifying the exact state of the case! I dared not write to Harriet, and say, frankly, "Tell me the worst. If you repent your intentions in my favour, let me learn it at once, and from yourself." I preferred being deceived; for, alas! the confirmation of my fears would have conveyed my sentence of death. At times, however, I grew desperate, and determined to know all; whether I had forfeited her affection, and by whose cruel interposition. What letters I wrote her—what appeals to her justice—what appeals to her mercy—what outpourings of all that was in my heart—those unimaginable mines of tenderness, deep hidden under seemingly barren soil, but revealed by the divining rod of the adept! Whole nights did I devote to the expression of my feelings! But, when the morrow came, and daylight and reason dawned together on my impassioned vigils, every line I had written was impetuously destroyed; and I subsided into the restless, repining, but submissive lover, who knows his claims to be so slender, that he dare not afford a provocation which may bring them to judgment.

On the other hand, as the time drew near for my explanation with Mrs. Stanley, my heart sickened at the prospect. Though my personal liking for Brookes was almost wholly extinguished by his cold-hearted and barefaced baseness, still he was Harriet's brother; and I recoiled from having to say, "This man whom you so loved, this man who so speciously won your affections, has sacrificed you to his interests in life." Judge, therefore, compassionate reader—judge of my surprise and joy, when, after the most careful

preparation, I at length stammered out the terrible announcement of his marriage, instead of the frantic emotions I had anticipated, I saw her gently raise her eyes to heaven; then, having bowed her head for some minutes in silence over the babe that was lying upon her knees, heard her murmur the simple ejaculation of—"Now, it is all my own!"—

"Now I am happy!" cried I, when, before I took leave of her that day, I saw that her usual gentle gravity had experienced no interruption from our trying explanation. "Now I can look forward to little Percy's christening as a day of comfort. I can scarcely tell you, dear Mrs. Stanley, what a weight is removed from my mind!"

"It is a puzzling task to interpret the feelings of others," was her rejoinder; "and I have no right to expect you should augur *very* favourably of mine. Still, I think you might have guessed that the possession of a treasure beyond my fondest hopes renders me less disposed to grudge the happiness of others. Let all be blessed in their own way. He cares for nothing but riches, and he has got them. I care for nothing but the interchange of an engrossing affection; and it is in store for me *here*. I shall live for love, and *he* for money! We are both more fortunate than we deserve."

On the christening-day, therefore, I was not surprised to find her composed to a sort of seraphic serenity, as she contemplated the little face of the creature about to be placed under the protection of Divine Grace—the creature that was to be all-in-all to her—the child that was to replace the loss of parents, husband, lover, friend! Old Mary, with the superstition of her calling, had laid aside her suit of sables, and prevailed upon Robson to do the same. Even the little cap and robe of the babe were adorned by the old woman with the white satin bows customary to such occasions; nor had her lady the heart to mortify the old creature by destroying her handiwork. Mr. Stanley had now been six months in the grave; and even the officiating clergyman would see nothing indecorous in the renouncement of mourning for an occasion replete with pious joy. The very season and the scene seemed to second our attempts at cheerfulness. It was the full rose-tide of the year; and huge bouquets of those exquisite and heart-rejoicing flowers were placed by the servants in every corner of the grim old mansion, so as to grace it for a moment with a blush of beauty and youth. The fragrance of the atmosphere thus created operated on my feelings like a charm, as we crossed the threshold.

My reverend friend, John Barnard, who, without being in my confidence, had gathered enough from the reports of the neighbourhood to be aware that circumstances of a delicate and painful nature attended the widowhood of Mrs. Stanley, could not forbear congratulating me as her friend, on the favourable change that had

taken place in her appearance, since, shortly before the birth of her child, he had administered to her the holiest rite of our faith. But as I was satisfied that he would not have overcome his scruples concerning the baptism of infants in church, except from belief that the mother was still incapable of quitting the house, I made no answer when he pointed out the exquisite bloom that mantled on her cheek while instructing poor old Mary in her duties of the day.

I verily believe I was the most nervous of the party, during the few minutes occupied by the baptismal vow! Barnard was inspired by the sentiments becoming his calling; poor Ethel by the inexpressible joy of presenting her child, her breathing child—her own, her only—to the lustration of grace. I alone remembered the sufferings of which it had been the cause under that roof, or the sin of which it was the seal. And I alone trembled, “rebuked by judgment to come.”

So heartfelt, however, was the mother’s hopeful joy, that unwilling to dispirit her by the sight of my grave countenance, I hurried the departure of Barnard the moment the ceremony was complete, that our presence might form no obstacle to the indulgence of her intense emotions.

As we were quitting the house, I noticed, standing in the hall, a servant in livery, who looked as if waiting for an answer to a letter; a circumstance of rare occurrence in that deserted house. Being anxious to get Barnard away, though the midsummer sun was at its hottest, I walked him off and walked him on towards his own house, as if we had been in January instead of June. Having accompanied Barnard home, as I had purposely prevented his sitting down to the collation prepared for us at Datchet, I could not decently decline his warm invitation to me to partake of a fruit luncheon that was awaiting him, and applaud some strawberries which, like every country curate’s home-grown strawberries, were “the finest in the world.” It was consequently some time before I got back to the barracks—where the first thing I saw was old Robson awaiting my return.

“I must come back to Datchet immediately. If I had the least regard for his poor lady, I must hasten back to Lisbon House.” Something terrible had occurred, he scarcely seemed to know what. Mrs. Stanley had been in a succession of fainting fits; between which, the only intelligible word she had been heard to utter, was my name.

“A letter *was* brought, then, by that fellow in the green livery? I thought so!” cried I. And though sorely disinclined to venture out again in the heat of the day, I could not refuse to step into the carriage and accompany him back. Re-admitted to the presence of Mrs. Stanley, I could scarcely persuade myself that it was the same person I had quitted two hours before.—An age

seemed to have passed over her head. An utter transformation seemed to have changed her very nature. She was indeed, as old Robson had described her, almost inarticulate. One might have believed she had undergone a paralytic seizure. Read *that!*" muttered she,—perceiving that her attempts at explanation left me more confused and amazed than before. And snatching a letter from her pillow, she placed it in my hand.—"Read it,—and tell me whether I am not sufficiently punished *now!*"

I read as she desired me,—though not so collectedly as I could wish:—for between every sentence I could overhear her indistinct mutterings of "Vengeance is mine. I will repay, saith the Lord!" His vengeance *hath* reached me. His vengeance *hath* indeed reached me!—But my punishment is greater than I can bear!"

CHAPTER XII.

Preach some philosophy to make me mad,
And in return, thou shalt be canoniz'd.
For being *not* mad, but sensible of grief,
My reasonable part produces reason
How I may be deliver'd of these woes,
And teaches me to kill or hang myself;
If I were mad, I should forget my woes.

SHAKESPEARE.

If anything *could* justify implacability in a Christian nature, it is well-grounded jealousy. Though not by nature cruel, I will not answer to what acts of vengeance I might have been prompted by infidelity in a wife. But no other motive could justify the infliction of such tortures as I saw endured by poor Ethel, that day, when apprized that neither *my* interference nor that of any other person could save her from the blow announced in the fatal letter!—Old Stanley's death-bed curse upon her "ungrateful injury" had been "not loud, but deep!" The measure of his vengeance was all the more deadly, for having appeared to pause. A codicil to his last will decreed that the child, which was to succeed to the whole of his property, should be placed under the care of his executors,—who were requested to act as its guardians,—on attaining the age of one month. Of these guardians, one was his banker and friend, Mr. Broadham of Lombard Street; the other, a disappointed brother-in-law, whose children, had his own marriage been unfruitful, would have succeeded to his estate. Neither of them was likely to be over-indulgent towards the mother thus bitterly punished; and they had some pretence for administering, with "the utmost rigour of the law," the will of the injured testator. Old Broadham, however, having had enough of guardianships, it was the brother-in-law, a retired proctor, whose heart

was of the consistency of a cuttle-fish, who undertook the charge of the infant; and fancied he was making a kindly concession to the widow, by despatching his footman with the admonitory letter announcing the deprivation of her child, instead of claiming it through one of the clerks of his office.

It was this letter which had to be answered when I arrived at Datchet. But what availed reply? The power was with *them*,—nay, the necessity of enforcing it was with *them*;—for Stanley had made a handsome legacy to his brother-in-law, contingent upon his rigid discharge of his duty.

I wrote, however, in her name, because she wished it, wrote because she had sent a verbal message, by the servant, promising to write, wrote because she had faith (woman-like) in the power of a letter. And all the time I was writing, she kept weeping at my side; and now and then, started forward and clung to my arm, retarding me in the discharge of my office, to enforce some yet more potent argument—some still tenderer plea than all the rest.

I warned her that she was humiliating herself for nothing—that these men had not even the option to befriend her—that law, as well as conscience, sanctified due discharge of the last wills of those departed. But still she wept and prayed so bitterly, still there was such hope, such trust within her heart, she was so convinced that no one could refuse a *mother*—a mother was a character suddenly invested with such thrice holy consequence in her young heart, that to refuse her was impossible. And the letter was sealed and sent; and poor Ethel fondly flattered herself that her cause was safe.

I never shall forget the smile with which she went and fetched the babe from the cradle, to indulge me with a sight of it, as the best reward that could be offered to my exertions. But old Mary, who knew all, and had witnessed her frantic excitement during the indictment of the letter, whispered to me, when Mrs. Stanley retired with it from the room to discharge her maternal duties, that, as it was, the results of such agitation might prove fatal to her nursling.

“And if anything should happen to the poor infant,” she said, “God help its mother!”

She also hinted, from her knowledge of the character of the brother-in-law of her late master, that mercy was as much to be expected of the nether millstone; and on my preparing to quit the house for the second time, her entreaties were still more earnest than those of Mrs. Stanley, that I would return to Datchet at an early hour on the morrow, to assist her poor mistress with my advice.

I wish I had not complied with her request. For it was a case in which all counsel was unavailing; and, but for my compliance, I had spared myself the sight of tears, and tones of prayer and anguish, that will haunt my memory for ever.

In answer to her letter, the guardian appeared in person, with proper attendants, to remove the child; judging, and perhaps wisely, that delays were dangerous. But neither he nor I had reckoned, nor could any *man*, though "of woman born," reckon on the force of superhuman energy, kindled by a mother's love, or the force it can assign to the arm, the voice, the step, the inspired and frantic eloquence of even the most delicate woman. All that she said, all that she did, all that she promised, might have moved a heart of stone. It did not touch that of a lawyer. She told the story of the infant. She proclaimed, to her misery, how much it was hers—to her shame, that it was not her husband's: and offered, with a sense of renunciation very different from that which had actuated *my* vows in its name the preceding day, to renounce, in its behalf, the pomps and vanities of the world, to resign all claim to the rich inheritance of Mr. Stanley, and retire with it to some obscure corner, and work for its maintenance, reserving her maiden name, and never to be heard of again by family or friends. But the man of law knew better than to regard this as feasible. He knew better than to accept the unchecked overflowings of her generous soul. There was but one path for him to pursue, that of his duty; and having requested me, in the belief that I was Mrs. Stanley's nearest friend, to remain with her, and take charge of life and limb at such a moment of desperation, he profited by the state of insensibility into which she had fallen on hearing his final negative, to place the nurse and child in his carriage, and hurry from the place. He had already promised me to write tidings of its safety to its unhappy mother; and so to place it, that, as soon as her first despairing frenzy was to be trusted, she might be admitted to frequent interviews. But for the present, he said, it would be best to leave her no address; that, for a time, all communication might be broken off.

"Till all this can be brought about," added he, "she is at liberty to remain at Datchet. Till the close of the year, the house will not be offered for sale."

I felt almost relieved on hearing the sound of his departing wheels. But the sensation lasted only till Ethel's restoration to consciousness convinced her that all hope was gone, that the light of her eyes was departed, and then I could have found it in my heart to crawl on my knees in the dust after this man, and pray him to have mercy. I really thought she was dying. I fully expected every moment would prove her last. The convulsions of her overtasked frame were as those of a person labouring under an attack of epilepsy. The two aged servants of her household entreated me, with tears, not to desert her, or rather not to desert *them* in this exigency. There was no one to afford them a single word of advice; and how much, alas, was needed! I remained

accordingly—remained the whole of the day—a day ending how differently from its joyous commencement!

It was not till very late at night I left Datchet. Ten to one, mischief would be made at some future time, of so prolonged a visit. But I cared not. On *her*, scandal must hereafter fall as on a stone; and as to me, the only person entitled to take umbrage at my doings, was of too generous a nature not to applaud my devotedness to the poor widow.

Next day, matters were worse. Agitation, combined with the sudden weaning of the child, and her carelessness of all precaution, had thrown Mrs. Stanley into a violent fever. Before night she was delirious. It was too late now for her to be solaced by the return of the little creature her soul so yearned for, which, all day, had been the object of her incoherent prayers. She would no longer have recognised its face. The proof was, that, in her paroxysms, she kept mistaking me for Barty; and throughout the night, in presence not only of poor Mary and the nurse, but of her medical attendant, addressing me the most heart-rending reproaches. Sometimes she fancied that the shade of Mr. Stanley approached her bedside; and, oh, how touching were her invocations to him for pity and pardon! She appealed to him as a father—as him who had replaced *her* father—to remember how she had been snatched from the obscure monotony of a school-room, and flung uncounselled into the world; how a mother's care, and female guidance had been wanting. And then, she told him how she had suffered, how she had repented, how she had been spurned and betrayed; and implored, in commiseration of all this, that he would give her back her child—her little one—her only one—the child that was hers alone! By Heaven's mercy, long hours of stupor succeeded to all this distraction. But she was not the less in danger. Poor old Mary's despair was too deep for tears, and even the physician shook his head. The following day, I was on duty; and a sad day it was, though I managed twice to ascertain, by message, that poor Mrs. Stanley was no worse. But she was no better. How *could* she be better, while body and soul were thus involved in one common struggle?

To my infinite regret, Lord James's leave was out, and he returned that very day to his quarters. For his wanton levity, that cared not what it aimed at or whom it wounded, was doubly tormenting at such a moment. I really believe he liked me in his heart, and that his early visit to me, on duty, was for the pleasure of seeing me again. But it seemed to me *then* as if he sought me only for the purpose of affording disagreeable intelligence concerning Barty Brookes.

"I wish to Heaven, my dear Percy," said he, "that you could see him perching like a peacock on his new roost! He and the

fair Sabina have obtained the absolute control of old Juckeson's establishment; and they are giving the best dinners in London, outshining Larch Lodge by a whole buffet of gold plate and half a dozen footmen in appropriate mace-coloured liveries. By clever management, Barty has managed to get up an amazing show of hands in their favour; old Yorkshire connexions of his family, Eton chums, the Suffolk friends of his sister and aunt, and among them my fair cousin Lady Georgiana Trench, who has taken half of Mrs. Brookes's opera-box."

Barty's wife with an opera-box!

"And is he the happier for all this ostentation?" was the cold inquiry.

"My dear fellow, I hardly set my eyes upon him. His better half was all I saw; and so gorgeous, that, like *Peau d'Ane* in her sunbeam-gown, she all but blinded me. Barty is seldom seen west of Temple Bar. Barty has become a city man; Barty is director of a dozen railroads, and thinks of nothing but money-spinning. The fellow can talk of nothing but capital. He seems to think he has accomplished the only purpose worth living for, by picking and stealing and scraping together what may be called a fortune."

"And Lady Georgiana?" said I, anxious to avoid hearing any more at that moment about Barty.

"Lady Georgiana? Hillo! What! are *you* going to follow Brookes's example, and sell yourself for a mess of pottage at last?"

"If I were, I should hardly need to ask you for news of her!" said I. "I was about to inquire, with quite as much interest, after the health of the Mandevales."

"Thank you! They are as well as can be expected, considering that his lordship has been undergoing the water-cure, to relieve him from the state of perfect health under which, for many years past, he has laboured; and that his wife, like other country-ladies who come up gaping after novelty in the London season, has swallowed the whole science of magnetism at a mouthful. I left her mesmerising her maid, to ascertain whether her mantuamaker would send home a new satin gown in time for the opera. And now, as you have been so good as to listen to all this without a single yawn, I will answer your query about the widow. Between ourselves, I suspect her hour is come; and *this* time, she has chosen well; for Donnington has no wits to lose, like poor Adolphus Trench, and will earn his crown of martyrdom as a mere simpleton to the last."

"You do not mean that she is going to marry Lord Donnington?"

"*She* means it, I fancy; for they are never apart. I don't know about *him*. But I never knew a man but yourself persist in cruelty to a pretty widow with a pretty jointure, who resolves to have him whether he will or no. They have set up a sort of firm of Donnington, Brookes, and Trench, which increases the consequence of

all its partners. You have no notion what fine folks Mr. and Mrs. Barty are becoming, under such illustrious patronage! I never address them except hat in hand, for it is as much as my place is worth not to give them the wall!"

All this would have been matter of rejoicing, or matter of indifference to me, but for the silence of Harriet. To my last two letters I had received no answer; and was too proud to write a third, petitioning for kinder treatment. My offices were just then so painfully in request at Datchet, that I had the less leisure to make myself uneasy. Yet uneasy I was. Even if Lord James's statement of Lord Donnington's change of purpose were correct—even if I had nothing to fear from the evil dealing of others, there is always—*always*—so much to be apprehended from the natural inconstancy of the sex. Women grow weary of waiting. Women find it so difficult to concentrate, in any of the relations or pursuits of life, their attention on a single object. Women are so apt to change, for very wantonness, when everything on earth conspires to insure their fidelity. And, alas! in *my* case, instead of being favoured by conspiring circumstances, everything and everybody was in league to justify the instability of her love. However, as I said before, I had a primary duty to perform, that forbade all weak indulgence in the fretfulness of desponding love. I trusted to Providence even as that poor, broken reed at Datchet trusted to myself!

CHAPTER XIII.

Du trépas, dans mes yeux, vois la terne lueur,
 Donne, oh ! donne moi tu main—dis mon nom—fais entendre
 Quelque mot consolant, s'il ne peut-être tendre !
 Des jours qui m'étaient dus, je n'ai que la moitié.
 Laisse en aller mon âme en rêvant la pitié!—

ALFRED DE VIGNY.

I HAD been warned by the physician in attendance at Lisbon House,—a good and humane man, as well as a skilful—that, in the event of his succeeding in reducing the high fever by which Mrs. Stanley's mind was now excited, much of her future safety would depend on the nature of the first impressions she received on the dawning of her reason. When he told me so, I scarcely listened; for, never before having seen a person affected by delirium, it seemed as impossible to *me* that the fever *should* subside, as for the dead to arise and walk! I could conceive nothing but the icy hand of death capable of tranquillizing those frightful paroxysms. But when, on the fourth day after her seizure, old Robson stood awaiting me in the hall, with tidings that an express had arrived from London, from the brother-in-law of Mr. Stanley,

entreating that his mistress would hasten to Wimpole Street, for that the infant's life was despaired of, I saw that, great as was the existing evil, worse might betide.

"What answer had been given?" was, of course, my first inquiry. Nor could I much wonder at the indiscreet zeal evinced by the attached old servant, in having despatched back word to the guardians that their relenting had come too late; that, thanks to their cruelty, his mistress also was on the verge of the grave; that those who had killed the child had killed the mother; that she was not even in a state of mind to comprehend the new calamity awaiting her.

"And Mrs. Stanley herself?" I next inquired.

"Better—decidedly better. Her night, sir, was far from tranquil; but towards morning, Mary says, she fell into a sweet sleep, as suddenly as the wind sometimes lulls after a storm. When the doctor came this morning, as usual, the first thing in his round of visits, she was still sleeping so composedly, that he would not have her disturbed. He looked in upon her, and said, 'Sleep was God Almighty's medicine, which was always the best;' and promised to call again in the afternoon. And will you believe it, sir? the strangest thing (only that poor Mary's word is as Gospel truth, I wouldn't believe it myself) all my poor mistress's ravings this blessed night were of her little boy, whom she had never named before since the fatal christening day; seeing him in her delusions sick—seeing him dying—and striving and struggling to get at him, to take him into her arms, and nurse him once again."

Myself a half-believer in magnetic influences, I felt less surprised at this clairvoyance than the old butler.

"But just on the turn of morning, sir, as Mary, and the nurse the doctors have sent in, were striving to hold her down, hoping that, from sheer fatigue, she would fall asleep at last, she suddenly clasped her hands together, as you have often noticed her do before, sir, and muttered something like, 'Tis over—God's will be done!'—and then sank into the deep sleep from which she has not yet awaked."

I was careful to insist that, when she *did* awake, if the prediction of the good doctor, that her mind would probably be restored to comparative composure were verified, no intimation should be given of the express from London, so as to hazard the re-disturbance of her faculties. To what purpose? She was as little capable of obeying the summons to visit her dying child, as of attempting a journey to Rome! It would have been a mere infliction of useless pain.

That day, on my return from what Lord James facetiously called one of my dry-nursing expeditions to Datchet (he called them so but once, however, for the stern expression of my determination not to be made the object of his coarse raillery silenced

him in a moment), I found, lying on my table, a packet, addressed in Barty Brookes's handwriting, which had arrived by the London coach. Convinced that anything despatched to me by the new Dives boded me no good, I felt an inexpressible repugnance to open it. It seemed as if everything issuing from his money-made and money-making house, must smell of pounds, shillings, and pence! In the present instance I was mistaken. The packet in question savoured only of treachery! It contained every gift I had ever bestowed upon his sister: a locket, a simple locket of crystal, containing my hair; a Breguet watch, by which I had happened to tell her the hour, in answer to the first question she ever addressed me, and which, two years afterwards, at parting, she accepted from me as a relic; and an old-fashioned sapphire ring, that had been once my mother's, exchanged for one of her own, in solemn troth-plight. My letters, too, not one of them wanting—sealed, and addressed to me in her own well-known handwriting! No mistaking, therefore, that this cold-hearted and cruel insult was an act and deed of her own! But because it *was* so cruel and so cold-hearted, it affected me less than might have been expected from my previous sensitiveness to every cloud that had passed over the sunshine of my love. I felt only indignant—enraged and indignant. Placing out of sight my claims upon the woman who had pledged herself to be my wife, attributing to petulance, arising from some unexplained mistake, the ungraciousness of *her* conduct (for even in anger I adhered to my conviction, that *she* could do no wrong) a long series of services to Barty, a long series of *affectionate* services, rendered it almost infamous that, the moment he found himself established in the world as one of the worshipful community of Mammon, he should turn upon me, and use me like a beggar!

It was late in the day. Choking with rage, I was forced to sit down to dinner, lest, peradventure, Lord James might have been in my room during my absence, and noticed the parcel addressed by Brookes. And very difficult did I find it to avoid getting into half a dozen quarrels in the course of dinner; so boiling was my blood, and so clearly did my jaundiced eye discern purpose of offence in even the simplest words addressed me.

Lord James had ridden over to Chertsey; and, having passed the Juckesons' house on his return, announced that he had made inquiries at the lodge, and that the family were not expected down during the summer or autumn. The furniture, in fact, had been partly sent to town. "Brookes has evidently determined those two superannuated idiots to settle in some other of their country seats!" said he. "I suppose he was afraid of having too many scrubby hangers-on, among his old friends hereabouts." And though this sortie could not possibly apply to his brother officers (the battalion

being already under orders for Winchester), I could not help fancying that his eye rested upon *me*, as he pronounced the word "scrubby." At last my ordeal was over; and, disentangling myself with some difficulty from my companions, I rushed up into my room, and bolted myself in, to ponder upon my injuries. Having thrown myself on my sofa, I trusted to enjoy an hour's peaceful deliberation upon the steps I had yet to take. Alas! ere half that time had expired, a loud tap at the door arrested the course of my bitter reflections. Concluding that it was one of my brother officers, I resolved not to answer. Again, after a pause, the knock was repeated; and still, I remained sullen and silent. At length a third tap was followed by the voice of the soldier who had formerly officiated as Brookes' servant, and was now mine, addressing me loudly by name. "A letter, sir!—a letter requiring an immediate answer—" "From London?" said I, as I instantly half-opened the door. "No, sir—from Datchet!" "From Datchet!" I exclaimed, feeling, I admit, in the peevishness of the moment, that of Datchet I had had something too much.

But when the light was struck, and I saw that the letter addressed in a strange writing, which was placed in my hand, contained a few scarcely intelligible and incoherent lines, traced by the hand of poor Ethel herself—yes! actually by the hand of poor Ethel—I reproached myself for my selfish petulance.

"Come to me, kindest and best of friends," wrote she, "that I may see you once more before I die."

Could I forbear?—could I hesitate? Pausing only to place in safety those now hateful objects and letters, which, when I touched them to lock them into my desk, felt as though I held some loathsome reptile in my hand, so that all the blood in my body seemed to flow back to my heart, I got into the carriage that was waiting; and, through the quiet sweetness of the summer night, hastened back to a spot which a sad presentiment forewarned me, even more than the letter I had received, I was about to visit for the last time.

Before I ventured to fulfil the purpose for which I was called, of entering the presence of Ethel, I had another short conference with Robson. It was necessary I should ascertain what changes had occurred.

"The worst, the very worst! Intelligence had arrived of the death of the infant—and his poor mistress knew all!"

I shook my head with a heavy sigh; not from agreeing with *him* that *this* was the worst that could happen, but from dread of the interview I was about to encounter.

"No, sir; she is quite calm, quite composed, quite herself *now*!" replied the old servant, in reply to the expression of my fears. "But the doctor says we must not think the better of her state for

that. He spoke more gravely, just now, about sending for her friends, than I ever heard him yet! It always seems such mockery, sir, when they talk of my poor mistress's friends."

Ay, mockery indeed,—poor helpless dependent from infancy on the mercies of the world! It was not, however, a moment to unnerve myself by too much pity.

Having caused my arrival to be announced, I waited in uneasy wretchedness till old Mary came to conduct me into the sick room. A chair was already placed for me by the bedside.

"Bring more light," said the sufferer, in a voice so changed, that I should never have guessed it to be that of Mrs. Stanley, "bring more light, Mary; I want to see his kind looks once again. I have been wandering so long in darkness! I have seen such threatening faces! Thanks!"—said she, when they placed the lamp on a table near enough to enable us to distinguish each other; and, extending her thin hand towards me, upon which I bowed my face, to conceal the tears which, in spite of all my resolution, fell profusely. "Friend!" continued she—"friend!" (as if repeating the word to herself, for her own pleasure, rather than addressing me) "what a name of comfort! I wanted to breathe it once again before I died."

"You have been so good to me!" said she, a moment afterwards, when her strength enabled her again to speak; "so good, so brotherly, so different from all the rest! *Your* heart is as the heart of one who has had a mother he respected, and sisters whom he loved. *You* can think of other things besides money; and from you, therefore, I still hope for support in the discharge of my last duties."

"Everything, my dear Mrs. Stanley—everything and anything in which I can serve you, you may command!" said I, lest she should weary herself by pleading.

"I want you to be my executor," said she, in a still hoarser voice, though faintly endeavouring to smile. "I am going to make my will. You will wonder why I want to make my will; I who have nothing, now that the poor fatherless babe they took from me is safe and happy with its Father that is in heaven. But the poorest has always some trifle, some tatter, some humble belonging to bestow; and there are those whose claims upon me are more by love than law. Will you, dear friend—will you undertake this last troublesome office for one who can reward you only by her prayers?"

Need I say how unconditional, how eager was my assent?

"But there is still time to think of this," said I, pressing within my own the poor, feverish hand she made no effort to withdraw.

"All you must think of now is the restoration of your strength. All you must think of is rest."

"Yes—*rest!*—But not the rest of this world. *Here* I must yet labour—here I must yet strive. Only for a season. My days are

done. My very hours are numbered. Already, the peace that passeth all understanding is dawning for me. I see what you cannot see, Percy; I hear what you cannot hear."

Having been previously apprized by Robson of a mental delusion entertained by Mrs. Stanley, that the spirit of her child was present with her—that it was come to summon her from this world—I was the less surprised when she calmly added—"My babe watches over me now, as once I watched over him; and I know that my prayers are heard, and that my appointed hour is come."

"If you could only prevail on my mistress, Mr. Percy, to take something to support herself, and try to sleep, instead of wearing herself out by talking, it would be such a blessing!" whispered her poor old heart-broken attendant.

"Do not be angry, do not scold me, dear Mary," said she, drawing the old creature, who had advanced towards the curtain, nearer to her by the sleeve, and resting her head upon her arm, as she had been accustomed to do in her childhood. "This is the last day's trouble you will ever have with me, Mary; the last—the last!"

The old woman stooped down and kissed her forehead. The dying woman seemed to have become her child again. The youth of eternity was on her brow. She was entering into a new stage of existence.

"I will do what you bid me now," added Mrs. Stanley, as if to reward the fond tears of genuine love that were fast falling on her cheeks. "I will rest. It is late—it is midnight. But you must not let my friend Mr. Percy leave the house. You must show him the room I ordered prepared for him; for to-morrow the lawyer is to be here. It was too late—he would not come from Windsor to-night. But to-morrow, at daybreak, he will accompany your friend Mr. Barnard, who is to visit me for the last time; and you will all join with me—will you not?—in accomplishing my last duties of this world."

Blinded with my tears, I followed the old nurse in silence to my destination;—convinced that the apprehensions of the dying woman were just, and that if she exerted herself for further conversation, strength might not be vouchsafed her for the discharge of the duties after which her parting soul aspired. Having been informed by Robson, who was waiting for me in my room, that the clergyman and lawyer had promised to be in attendance at eight o'clock, I dismissed him, on pretence of wishing to sleep, to be prepared for such early rising. Sleep, however, under such circumstances, how could I! And I had neither book nor writing materials to beguile the intervening hours. Only my own sad thoughts! Only the bewildering fancies of one who was beginning to doubt whether anything real, or true, or good, or holy, existed in this self-seeking world! Under the consciousness of my own

wrongs,—of the dying Ethel's,—I writhed again! And then recurred to my memory, as by a sort of phantasmagoric vision, the words I had perused that morning in a London paper—"On Saturday last Mr. and Mrs. Brookes entertained a select dinner party at their splendid mansion in Portland Place. Among the company were—" But why recapitulate the accursed list of Dukes and Lords, to live among whom with appropriate brilliancy of equipage, and a befitting number of rogues in livery, Barty had sold his soul, and sacrificed the peace and well-being of others besides himself!

I could not bear the glare of the candles—a mere mockery of my want of occupation. Having extinguished them, and drawn aside the curtains, to admit the soft moonlight, so much more soothing to my aching senses, I found that my chamber occupied the side of the old house overshadowed by a fine old cedar-tree. A gentle summer breeze was agitating its branches; and as they rose and fell, a dark shadow, as of funereal plumes, was traced by the moonlight on the white walls of my chamber. Was it an omen? The supernatural vision described by Walpole in his *Otranto* occurred at that moment to my mind. Alas! what invention of the most poetical human imagination, but has its prototype in the eternal treasury of nature! At length, weary and exhausted, I threw myself upon the bed in my clothes, and gradually fell asleep,—a distracted and restless sleep,—but enough to render me unconscious of surrounding objects. When I woke, Robson was by my side, and the sun shining full into my chamber. "The gentlemen were already come. Mrs. Stanley was tolerably composed. They had both been with her these ten minutes." In ten more, I had joined them. But I was not sorry to see that her medical attendant had also made his appearance; so that, if the exertions she meditated were too much for her, he was at hand to oppose his veto.

"I have profited by your absence, my dearest friend, to execute a portion of the duty that lies heavy on my hands," said she, as I approached the bedside,—“My last will has been written from my dictation, and awaits only my signature.”

The saddened faces of those surrounding the bed apprized me that, in spite of the firm voice in which she spoke, these preparations were not premature, and that all hope was over.

"What I have now to ask of all present, and especially, doctor, of *you*," continued she, with impressive steadiness—"is, whether they consider my mind in a sufficiently clear and collected state to execute a valid will?"

"Perfectly so," was the unhesitating reply of those to whom she appealed. "And I am prepared to attest it on oath," was the further confirmation of her medical attendant.

A moment afterwards, she affixed her name to the deed placed

before her by the solicitor ; and though her tremulous hand had scarcely power to perform the office, the clearness of her purpose was perceptible to all. The man of the law and my friend Barnard, as well as her physician, next added their signatures, as witnesses. *My* assistance she declined, as being interested in the will ; which, when duly executed, was placed in her lawyer's custody ; and he and the doctor immediately withdrew together. Aware, however, that his patient was about to receive the last consolations of her faith, the latter whispered to me as he passed, that he would not immediately quit the house. From indications I was less able to interpret than himself, he saw that her end was near.

On the dread solemnities that followed, let me not presume to touch. Suffice it that she requested my permission for the two old servants to share with us the sacred rite, in which I had already proposed to participate. Previous to the administration, in a broken voice and with the unnatural light of death gleaming in her eyes, and streaming in feverish patches on her cheek, Mrs. Stanley made a full confession of her fault ;—an act of atonement,—a public pardon-seeking,—that, through humbleness and contrition, her soul might find grace in the sight of her Eternal Judge. After the last words of the sacred ceremony that followed, she seemed indisposed to speak again. Signing to us that she wished to sleep, she laid down her head upon her pillow,—and never raised it again !

Having withdrawn at her bidding, as soon as Barnard had taken his departure I joined the doctor, who was sitting on a bench under the cedar-tree, awaiting a summons ; and whilst we were still talking of her, her beauty, her gentleness, her edifying penitence and grace, the window of her room was hastily thrown open by old Mary, calling to us to hasten up. “ Her mistress was dying.”

Alas ! she was not dying, she was *dead* ! The sleep which she had felt stealing upon her so gradually, was the sleep of death !

Thank God, it was given to me to look upon her in those first moments of her release ! But for *that*, I should never have known to what glory human beauty might attain. Oh ! my poor Ethel ! Oh, my ill-fated friend ! who could gaze upon the heavenly smile that irradiated thy poor wasted face, without thanking Him by whom thy prolonged trials were ordained, that thou hadst at length entered into thy rest !

Knowing myself to be the delegate of her last will, I was forced to hasten off after the lawyer, who had by this time reached Windsor with it in his possession, that the seal so lately affixed might be broken in his presence. It was necessary to ascertain, without loss of time, her pleasure concerning the disposal of her remains. As I suspected, they were not to lie at Datchet. “ I dare not,” was the tenour of the will, “ propose that my grave should be

made near the vault of the family I have disgraced. Let me be buried in the churchyard of Old Windsor. Other unfortunates, besides myself, have been admitted there." Mrs. Stanley probably alluded to the tomb of Perdita. The other injunctions of the will were dictated in the same lowly spirit. A few family jewels of some value, bequeathed to her by an aunt, were to be sold, and the sum produced expended on a life-annuity for poor old Mary. Robson, who had been liberally provided for by his late master, was requested to accept her watch and desk as a token of grateful regard. The rest of her property, of whatever kind or sort, was bequeathed to me. Out of it, I was to defray her funeral expenses, and become her residuary legatee. The terms of the bequest were those of the utmost affection. She described me as the friend who had been true to her in adversity as in prosperity, in sickness as in health, brother in all but name.

Yes! I had been indeed her brother; and she, the gentlest and best of sisters. When I accompanied old Mary and the nurse into her chamber after she had been placed in her coffin, to look for the last time upon her solemn clay-cold face—my tears fell more for myself than *her*. The lid was about to close upon the only living being to whom my welfare was more than a matter of indifference.

CHAPTER XIV.

Is she dead?

Why so shall I be, ere these Autumn blasts
Have blown on the beard of winter.

PROCTOR.

I HAD torn myself from my sad devotions by her side, and was entering into the necessary particulars with Robson concerning the precautions to be observed to render the funeral (which was to take place on the morrow) as private as possible, when a scared-looking housemaid ushered into the cedar parlour where we were standing a stranger, whose outward man wore the unmistakeable characteristics of the lawyer's clerk.

"Mr. Robson, I presume?" said he, addressing my companion, without removing his hat either in deference to the grey hair of my companion, or my air of astonishment. "In that case, I am instructed by the executors of Mr. Stanley to apply to you for information concerning the next of kin of his late wife, whose decease we see announced in the newspapers."

"My poor lady had no next of kin," replied the old servant.

"Everybody, if born in wedlock, my dear sir, must have a next of kin of some kind or other," replied the clerk with a smile of superiority; "a next of kin, or representative—"

"*This* gentleman is poor Mrs. Stanley's representative," interrupted Robson, mistaking his drift, "her sole executor and legatee."

Off went the hat of the lawyer's clerk. I was not then, as he had supposed, the undertaker's clerk, arranging the funeral ceremony?

"In that case, sir," said he, turning respectfully towards me, "I may spare myself the trouble of all further inquiries. My business is with you. You will, perhaps, favour my employers (solicitors to the executorship of Mr. Stanley's estate) with the name of your man of business, with whom they will immediately communicate touching the administration to the infant."

Finding myself completely in the dark, I frankly told him so. "What possible business could I have with the executors of Mr. Stanley's estate?"

"Only, sir, that by a sad oversight on his part, one of the frequent fatal results, sir, of a gentleman in a moment of petulance making his own will, instead of consulting his legal advisers, Mr. Stanley took no precautions against so probable a contingency as the death of his posthumous child, during its minority; and no provision being made to the contrary, the whole of his fine fortune, sir, lapsed to the mother, as sole heir to the infant. Mrs. Stanley's having survived the child a couple of days, will be the means of depriving the brother-in-law of her late husband of something like ninety thousand pounds—ninety thousand pounds, sir, besides the house we are in, and other valuable realities."

"You really mean," said Robson, (for I admit that *I* was too much startled for speech,) "that the whole of my master's property will, after all, escape the fangs of those cruel mischief-making people, whose officious interference drove him into his grave?"

"I mean, Mr. Robson, that every guinea of it belongs to Mrs. Stanley's representative or representatives," replied the clerk, with a deprecating bow towards myself.

"I congratulate you, Mr. Percy, sir, I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart!" cried the old man. "God knows I did not think any thing in this world could afford me a moment's pleasure again! But you deserve it, sir, and twice as much! Yes! you richly deserve it!—the interposition of Providence has done this, to reward you for all your goodness in this house."

The lawyer's clerk, on the contrary, was convinced that it was the interposition of the law which had stood my friend; and the vulgar obsequiousness of his manner attested that he was eager to be considered my friend also. I was too much bewildered, however, to do more than refer him to the solicitor at Windsor, for a sight of Mrs. Stanley's will, in confirmation of my claims.

Professions of disinterestedness are ever suspicious things. Yet I cannot help relying upon the reader's belief in my assurance that, at *that* moment, this extraordinary—this unlooked-for—this incredible accession of fortune possessed no charm for me. I had lost everything besides fortune. I had lost the two in whom my soul

delighted. My last friend was lying in the chamber overhead—a shrouded corpse. What signified money? What signified silver and gold? Would they bring back to my ear the dear voices I was to hear no more? Would they again enclasp in mine the hands whose touch was denied me for ever? No, no! Riches were mockery *now!*”

Before four-and-twenty hours had elapsed, other thoughts had, of course, possession of my mind. There was some pleasure in thinking of the liberal reward I should be able to bestow on those who had ministered to the last hours of my departed friend; above all, in knowing that a comfortable, happy home would be provided for the old age of poor old Mary. Nay, it was a satisfaction to think that I had it in my power to raze to the ground the hated walls of Lisbon House, which had witnessed so much care, so much wretchedness.

My very first interview with the Windsor solicitor, however, gave a new turn to the current of my ideas. Long employed by the late Mr. Stanley for the transaction of local business, he was sufficiently aware of the nature and extent of his property, to wish me joy on having succeeded to a princely fortune. The two thousand a-year bequeathed to old Stanley by his parents had been more than doubled under his administration; and the lawyer began forthwith to enlarge on the value of his client's Buckinghamshire farms, of his canal property, his East India stock, his railway shares, his long annuities, his I know not what: till it appeared to *me* that everything short of the mines of Golconda was included in this miraculous inheritance. His deference towards me knew no bounds. Instead of a poor Honourable—a miserable Lieutenant in the Guards—I had progressed into a Man of Capital! God forbid that it should transform *me* to the degree in which it had affected the character of Barty Brookes!

Only a little month before, and how different a train of reflection would have arisen from this unexpected stroke of fortune. To be shared with Harriet, how different an aspect it would have assumed! How much larger, in that case, had been half, than now the whole! God forgive me! I am afraid that my joy, under such circumstances, would almost have reconciled me to the loss of my hapless friend.

It was not, however, till I had presided at the last sacred rites due to her memory, that I suffered myself to give my thoughts to worldly interests. After turning with a heavy heart from hearing the dust rattled upon her coffin, I had hardly courage to bear the congratulations of my friend, John Barnard, who had been apprized by Robson of my singular change of circumstances.

Rather to get away from the regiment and avoid all chance of coarse allusions on the part of Lord James, than for the purpose of consulting the lawyers, I had already obtained leave of absence; and on the evening of the funeral I hurried to town.

My first visit was to the solicitor of the estate. Yes—I was indeed rich beyond my wildest anticipations. They admitted my right to be unimpugnable. The executors were prepared to take out letters of administration to the infant, and make over the property at once. The brother-in-law seemed to feel that his vexation would be eased by getting rid of every trace of the business.

My interviews with these moneyed people had, I cannot deny, a curious influence on my mind. Unaccustomed to hear a fortune spoken of as a mine to be worked, rather than as a blessing to be enjoyed, I had not talked to them an hour before I began to discern a sort of vitality in money. Its procreative power seemed to double its importance. *Who* was to limit the extent of its reproduction? What rich man but might become immediately rich? For, as the shifts of poverty beget greater poverty, capital is made to beget capital, like the multiplication of some swarming insect tribe. Alas! instead of sickening at these demonstrations of lucre-love, as only a month previously would have been the case, the theme was growing pleasant. The discussion appeared to enlighten my eyes on a thousand points hitherto obscure. Prodigious vistas opened suddenly into the mysteries of life. Methought I could see further into the actions and prospects of my fellow-creatures; and I became (will it be believed?) more indulgent even with Barty himself. Barty, in early life an eye-witness of the supreme interest of financial operations, as well as a participant in the comforts of opulence, Barty had certainly some little pretext for his endeavours to extricate himself from the miserable poverty into which he had been flung by his relations in order to overgorge the consequence of the head of the family. Nay, after a second interview with, not the crabbed brother-in-law, self-frustrated of his inheritance, but with the sober, solid, demure, well-spoken Justinian Broadham, Esq., the dissenting member of parliament, I could understand that, to a family established on the broad basis of thousands per annum, and thousands of acres open to the sun, my wretched substance of a pair of colours and a few hundreds a-year must have placed me in the light of a despicable Johnny Lackland; so as to render excusable in the eyes of Miss Brookes's friends any attempt, of whatever nature, to save her from throwing herself away on a lot so replete with disgrace. Doubtless, my old friend Barty *had* done his best to circumvent the match. But he had not acted treacherously! I had been forewarned of his objection to the acquaintance. I had been apprised of his opposition to the intimacy. He had never affected to encourage my attachment. What right, therefore, had I to complain? Though I had largely befriended *him*, it was with my purse, with my strong arm, in getting him out of scrapes and quarrels; and these obligations he had repaid. But when had I

ever offered him a charming sister, to be degraded into his companion for life? With such flimsy sophistry did I deceive myself; and having completely satisfied my mind that it was only my want of means to support her as she deserved that had actuated the conduct of her brother, I took a desperate resolution. What had occurred—what had *inevitably* occurred,—might be no less painful to them than to myself. They might be as willing as I was to accept advances made to them under circumstances more propitious.

Without hesitating a moment after this notion had entered my head, I drove straight to Portland Place. In some contingencies, *viva voce* explanations are best. I would see Barty. A single glance at his face, while my explanations were making, would satisfy my mind whether the offence offered me were personal, or the mere result of the contrarieties of life.

We were now in the middle of July. On my way toward the west end, the Bedford Square purlieus of the town, which I had to traverse, were all but deserted. The Bloomsbury folks, who go into the country to eat strawberries, and see their roses blow, had deserted their town quarters; and the unsophisticated, who prefer sea-bathing, when even the ocean is tepid, were probably at the coast. The Juckeson tribe, I feared, might be at Cowes. Precisely! When I reached the number in Portland Place, stigmatized by its fashionable neighbours as "*C'est Selon*," or the "*Spice Islands*," and described by the newspapers as "the splendid mansion of Mr. Brookes," I saw that it was closed for the season. What would I have given, at that moment, to have found it open and animated! Half my newly-acquired fortune! Before I got as far as Langham Place on my way to my hotel, however, I turned back; resolved, at least, to inquire Barty's country address, that I might lose no time in writing to him. I already knew that the family was not expected to visit Larch Lodge. The deaf and dirty housemaid who opened the door was little disposed to understand or answer. At length she brought me a slip of paper, that had been left for the re-direction of the newspapers; and the next moment I was off, 'almost at a gallop, towards Charing Cross, to take my place in the mail. Barty and his wife were actually at Oak Hill; and whatever explanations were to be made, might be made in person, and to the united family. For I had a general invitation to the Mandevales — friendly people, — whose young friends gradually progressed into old friends, and whose steady good will and good nature were unsusceptible of ebb or flow.

Once on the road, by way of keeping up my resolution, I kept congratulating myself on my courage in starting at once, in spite of appointments with solicitors and proctors; making the business on which depended all the happiness of my future life, its

first object. Right pleasant was the cool of the night for travelling; and my sole companion being a young country clergyman, returning to his cure, after a visit to his relations, with as ample subject for his reverie as I for mine, the journey was undisturbed, save by the occasional starts of a lover's fears. If, after all, the strange conduct, the strange silence preserved towards me by Harriet, should *not* be the result of compulsion, or even over-persuasion, if she should be changed, if she should have ceased to love me? But no—it was *impossible*! Such overweening affection as mine *could* not have begotten a slight attachment in return. She *must* dearly love, she *must still* love the man who prized that preference beyond all the other objects of existence!

And if I had thought and felt this at Windsor, or in London, how much more, as every step we advanced drew me nearer towards *her*! That well-remembered road! The last time I traversed it, six months before, what heart-beating hours were those consumed in the journey! How I then considered and reconsidered the little cadeaux I had brought her; and though I had admired them at the moment of purchase, discovered, as our interview approached, how unworthy they were of being offered!

But what I experienced on my former journey was light as a feather, compared with the emotions that distracted me now—*now* that I was come to say, “Not even your unkindness, beloved, has availed to alienate my affection! I am come again, to grovel at your feet—I am come again, to say, be my wife, my friend, my household ruler! I am come again, opulent and independent; and all I have is yours. Dispose of it. Dispose of *me*! But, in return, restore me that cherished place in your heart, which, Heaven knows, I have done nothing to forfeit!”

Lucky for me, perhaps, that the mail stopped nearly twenty miles from the secluded neighbourhood of Oak Hill; so that I had nearly three hours' posting before me, when, at eight in the morning, I took leave of my companion. There needed the open face of day, and the irritation of provokingly stupid post-boys, to restore me to myself. Neither bribery nor threats would induce them to risk their horses, or their necks. It was, consequently, about eleven before I reached the village I had to traverse. The breakfast hour of Oak Hill was long past. Who knows but I might catch a glimpse of Harriet's white dress in the garden; or perhaps encounter Barty himself, with his fishing-tackle, making his way to one of the finest trout-streams in England. “Get on!” cried I, as in the very centre of the village, towards the church, the post-boys thought proper to slacken their pace, as post-boys do in villages, to receive nods of recognition from the cottage doors. “How many times must I tell you to get on!” But, having put my head out of the window, to add due force to my exhortations, I perceived that the obstacle which impeded our way, or

rather the obstacle to which the boys and horses seemed disposed to concede some reverence, was a profusion of flowers upon the road. As far as the eye could reach, roses and acacia blossoms were scattered upon the summer dust; that is, *not* as far as the eye could reach, but as far as the church porch. There, the shower of blossoms ended; and I now perceived that the cracked bells of the old church were jangling a merry peal. A wedding—a wedding of some moment, an event as rare in that quiet neighbourhood as it was auspicious. *A wedding!* My heart danced within me at the very name!

But while uttering my outcry to the post-boy, my face had been recognized in the village. A certain Joe Hanson, an old favourite of mine, as one of Mandevale's under-keepers whom I had formerly tipped handsomely to secure me a good place in the coverts, stepped forward, hat in hand, to the chaise-window, to welcome me to Suffolk.

"But you're too late, Cap'n!" said he, evidently a little the worse for early cheer, "you're *just* too late! The weddingers, and the rest of the grand folks, was off for the Park half an hour ago. Sure you must have heard the two fieldpieces, Cap'n, as the keepers let off at the North Lodge, when the carriage started from the door?"

"*What* weddingers, Joe, *what* grand folks?" said I: a horrible presentiment all but strangling my utterance.

"My lord and Miss Harriet, Cap'n. I thought, maybe, you was come for the wedding. Sure," added he, misinterpreting my look of blank consternation, "sure you remember the young lady as bides with old Madame Brookes, up at Oak Hill?"

"She was married this morning, then, to Lord Donnington?"

"Why, don't your honour hear the *bells*?" cried Joe, by way of reply. "There was a power of fine folks in the church. The Park family, in course; and the widdy lady from The Danes; and Miss Harriet's rich brother, from Lon'on, with his young wife; and Sir Richid and *his* lady, from the North; and a deal more, bridesmaids and bridesmen, and what not; and they say Miss Harriet's to have a place at court, and will eat on gold and silver, all as one as a queen!"

With a vague, foolish smile, I asked him for a glass of water, and having enforced with a sovereign my request that he would not mention to any living soul at the Hall, or Oak Hill, having seen me, bade the post-boys resume the high road, and make for the nearest post-town, at about two miles distance.

"Stop!" said I, as they were about to crack their whips for departure, (probably considering their inconsistent customer fit only for a strait-waistcoat) and beckoning Joe again to the window, I made him pick up for me one of the faded flowers from the road. He offered, of course, to bring me a fresh rose from the nearest cottage-

garden, in place of the faded thing, bespoiled with dust, which he placed in my hand, and for which he refused to accept the further gratuity I flung him. How little did he dream, poor fellow, what that flower was to me ! I have kept it ever since ! So long as I live—not long, perhaps—it shall have a place near my heart !

Such is my friend's simple version of a tale of every-day occurrence, yet replete with the foul treacheries engendered by lucre-love ; for need it be added, that the false representations of Mr. Brookes had induced the precipitate act of his sister ? Little exaggeration had sufficed to convince her, that the devoted attentions of poor Percy, at Datchet, were addressed to the fair widow and her jointure, rather than to the sad widow and her death-bed ! Convinced that she was betrayed, she had been tempted to betray in her turn. Between Lady Georgiana Trench, who had set her heart on making the warm-hearted, ingenuous Percy, her own, and Barty, who considered his sister's disdain of Donnington Castle and twenty thousand a-year a folly, nay, a crime, which her family would be unpardonable in sanctioning—the mild, inexperienced girl was sacrificed for life !

For life ? Alas ! her penance was not of long duration. *Too* long, however, for she lived to be undeceived. She lived to learn the truth. It was not till the summer of the following year, that the grass was growing upon her grave !

THE MAN OF CAPITAL :

OR, OLD FAMILIES AND NEW.

CHAPTER I.

England, bound in with the triumphant sea,
Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege
Of watery Neptune, is now bound in with shame,
With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds.

SHAKESPEARE.

"I SHALL be rather curious to know who has bought Deasmarsh," observed a middle-aged country lady to a middle-aged country gentleman, as they sat watching the decline of day, one summer evening, over the vast tract of landscape visible from the lofty windows of their parlour. And both gentleman and lady, both landscape and the square ill-furnished chamber to which it afforded an almost unbounded view, were of so featureless and uninteresting an order, that there was some excuse for Mrs. Cromer's regarding as a somewhat important incident, the sale of a considerable farm situated in the same parish as their own dull mansion of Cromer Hall.

"It is a thousand pities but what one of old Smith's daughters could have kept it from going out of the family," added the Squire's lady.

"Old Smith's three daughters are married to London tradesmen, whose husbands are on the look out for ready money—not for a Northamptonshire farm," rejoined the Squire. "It was always understood that, at the old man's death, the property would be sold. These are not times when people in business can afford to sink any part of their capital in land;—a losing game, God knows, in this part of the country!"

"At all events," persisted Mrs. Cromer, "it is much to be regretted that Deasmarsh could not be bought by some person belonging to the neighbourhood."

"And why, pray? In the first place, not a family hereabouts possesses the means of half such a purchase. The upshot price of Deasmarsh is fifteen thousand pounds! Even if, by means of mortgage, the purchase had been effected by Farmer Richards, what would have become of the land, in the hands of people with-

out loose money to lay out. In old Smith's possession, it has gone to rack and ruin."

"Let us hope, then, at least, that it will be bought by moneyed people," said Mrs. Cromer, turning to what she considered the safe side of the question. "As your brother was saying the other day, my dear, when he wanted to stir you up into bidding for the property, it would be a great thing for the parish to get an active thriving man at Deasmarsh."

"A great thing for the parish? Why couldn't he say, at once, a good thing for the parson?" rejoined Mr. Cromer. "Jacob is the most selfish fellow in the world! Jacob is always thinking of number one! Instead of wanting an active man at Deasmarsh, all he looked to in suggesting the purchase to me (when he knew I could just as easily buy in Belvoir Castle!) was to secure himself *against* having an independent man in the farm, who might make himself troublesome in the vestry, and thrust his finger into the parish pie!"

"I really think Jacob wished you to endeavour to buy the land, because it is likely to go for a song," argued his wife. "No competition is expected. In this out-of-the-way corner of the county, what is there to attract strangers?"

"Little enough, I admit. But depend upon it Jacob had no other object in pestering me about it, but to better his living. There he is, in clover, in his snug parsonage, within a few hundreds a-year as well off as his elder brother! For *my* part, I often wish I'd been born a second son, and enjoyed the family living instead of the family estate, which entails endless plagues, and loses in value every year!"

"Do not forget, however, that, as the eldest, the living reverts to your second son; whereas Jacob must provide for those who come after him out of his income, or by insuring his life."

"If he *have* laid by out of his income, why couldn't he purchase Deasmarsh himself, instead of tormenting *me*?" demanded Mr. Cromer, now thoroughly roused up.

"Deasmarsh? Why, you said, just now, my dear, that the upshot price was fifteen thousand pounds. Surely Jacob never could have saved anything like *that*?"

"How am I to know! But 'tis no affair of ours. That girl of his has excellent health. *We* shall never be the better for his savings. As to this sale, which seems to have taken such a hold upon your mind, the result will transpire in a day or two. So, instead of wasting more talk upon the matter, suppose you order tea."

And in a day or two, they heard enough of the result! Deasmarsh was indeed sold for a song! A property well worth eighteen thousand pounds was knocked down at little more than ten!

"And who the deuce has got it?" demanded Mr. Cromer of his

brother, after complaining that a hint ought to have been afforded him by his friends how matters were likely to turn out.

"Ghrimes of Northampton was the bidder; but evidently not for himself," replied Jacob Cromer, a far better conditioned man than his elder brother. "Somebody said in the room that he was employed by a gentleman belonging to one of the manufacturing districts—"

"A *gentleman* belonging to the manufacturing districts!" sneered the Squire.

"Whose object is, of course, an investment."

"Surely Hutton's farm belongs to somebody of that kind?" interposed Mrs. Cromer.

"And so it does!" cried her brother-in-law, regardless of the impatient shrug of the shoulders with which the Squire habitually silenced the observations of his wife; "and unless I'm much mistaken, Ghrimes is the man who receives his rent! I have seen Ghrimes once or twice in the village, within the last few years; and I'm sure I don't know what else could bring him here."

"You conclude, then," was the surly rejoinder of his brother, "that Ghrimes's client is now the owner of Deasmarsh and Hutton's farm; and, in that case, the most considerable landed proprietor in Deaswold?"

"I have a shrewd guess such will turn out to be the case!" rejoined his brother. "Provoking enough, considering what the Cromers have been in this parish, for more than three centuries past! However, *that* standing, John, no one can take from us; and as this cotton-spinning or stocking-weaving gentleman, or whatever he may happen to be, is never likely to show his face here to oppress us with his wealth and consequence, we are perhaps better off than if Richards or some other farmer of these parts had made a stretch to accomplish the purchase."

The Squire, however, had been too long King in Thule to have much taste for abdicating even the shadow of his wooden sceptre. So far as the lofty spire of Deaswold was visible, he fancied that his sovereignty was acknowledged. The manor had been in his family ever since the cessation of the war of the Two Roses; and though to this dignity was attached an estate within some hundreds of two thousand a-year, as the Cromers from sire to son were an unambitious generation, wasting nothing on a shallow pretence at London fashion, or speculations still more perilous, it had hitherto sufficed their utmost pretensions. The great square brick Hall which surveyed the country round from the top of a meagrely-wooded hill, through windows whose white bordering gave them the staring look imparted to the human eye by flaxen eye-lashes, still held up its head self-satisfied and unrivalled. If, by some rare chance, a traveller, wrecked upon the parish, demanded *whose* was that frightful place, the respectful manner in which the

urchins on the road replied that it was "the Squire's," while their mothers tugged at their shoulder and amended the vague reply into "Squire Cromer's, if you please, sir," satisfied every inquiring mind that, though Squire Cromer's house might be unsightly and his lands unpicturesque, he was a great man after all. As indeed he was. At Deaswold the Squire was monarch of all he surveyed. His brother Jacob, reared in the ultra-conservative principles of the last century, which required the juniors of a family whose estates were entailed, to honour not only their father and mother, but their elder brother, paid far more respect to the Squire's authority than it deserved.

For that the Cromers were an unambitious generation resulted from the weakness rather than the strength of their minds. Too unintelligent to suggest improvement, either in themselves or their belongings, the extensive property attached to the Hall was farmed by the Squire precisely on the same principles it had been farmed by his grandsire. Of modern improvements in rural economy he knew nothing, and took care not to improve his knowledge either by reading or observation; while, as to refurnishing or remodeling his house, nothing short of a fire would have driven him to so dire an extremity. It was an article of religion with him that every thing should remain in the state in which, at the marriage of his father, sixty years before, Cromer Hall had been fitted up in honour of the bride.

For some generations past, indeed, the family had maintained its consequence by the lucky limitation of its olive-branches. Whenever these chanced to exceed the couple of sons to be maintained by farm and glebe, the pruning-hook of measles or hooping-cough was sure to reduce the family to the dimensions provided for by the wisdom of their ancestors; and as there was consequently no incentive to the Squire regnant to increase his means by the exercise of his wits for the benefit of younger children, the wits and estate were allowed to lie fallow together.

But with the uninteresting couple that now filled the throne of squirearchy, matters were different. In addition to two cubs rearing at Rugby, there were three daughters at school in the neighbourhood of London; the necessity of laying by fortunes for whom served at once to render their parents less hospitable than their predecessors, and dispose their neighbours to see as little as might be of so provident a couple.

This system of things, however, did not extend to the Rectory. Though the worthy Jacob had a daughter to provide for by his economies, he saw no cause to render life a burthen because he was one day or other to lay it down. From the impulses of a genial nature rather than of a reasoning mind, he was disposed to extract enjoyment from whatever came in his way: the common gifts of Providence,—the ordinary companionships of life. Fine

weather, a pleasant walk, a cheerful friend, sufficed to make the warm-hearted parson thankful and content.

While something less than a mile divided the Hall from the Parsonage, leagues and leagues intervened between the dispositions of the two brothers; and though for many years past they had met daily, it was strange how little the temper of the one had rubbed off on the character of the other. Absorbed by the interests of his farm, Mr. Cromer's face had always a careworn look; and when not occupied in directing his men or disputing with his tenants, he went moping about the country on an old bay mare, as dull and sullen as himself. In the mind of such a man, considerable curiosity was necessarily excited by the transfer of so large a portion of the property bordering his own to hands unknown. From the tenants of Deasmill and another small farm included in the sale of Deasmarsh, he vainly endeavoured to learn more than that, for the short remainder of their leases, the rent was to be paid to "Torney Ghrimes; but, with the tenant of Hut-ton's he was on such uneasy terms, in consequence of game-preserving squabbles, as to be unable even to address himself to *him* for information touching the identity of the new landlord and the old. The Squire was forced, therefore, to chew the cud of his discontent at having lost so golden an opportunity, with all the aggravation of not knowing precisely upon whom to wreak his spite.

"I suppose, John, you've heard the news?" cried the Rector on meeting his brother one day, about a month afterwards, on his return from a trip to Northampton.

"What news do I *ever* hear!" was the peevish rejoinder of the Squire. "You, I presume, have seen Ghrimes, and discovered at last the name of your new parishioner?"

"Better than that!—a plaguy deal better than that!" resumed Jacob, rubbing his hands: "I have heard news, my dear John, that will put some thousand pounds into your pocket!"

"Some thousand pounds into *my* pocket? 'Come, come!' exclaimed the Squire, unwrinkling without further hesitation the deep furrows of his brow.

"The new branch of the Midland Counties Railroad is to cut right through the heart of Deaswold!" cried Jacob, with a countenance that glowed like the meridian sun.

"A railway through Deaswold?"

"Where even a turnpike-road appeared a blessing past praying for!" added the Rector. "I take it you will nearly double the value of your property."

"But are you certain of all this, Jacob?" persisted the Squire. "Remember the canal vagary you got into your head ten years ago!"

"Ay, ay! but this time, I have seen the plans. I can't under-

stand, by the way, how that fellow Ghrimes, as solicitor to the company, managed to get the parish so accurately surveyed without our knowledge! And, what's more, I've taken half a dozen shares on my own account."

"This is the most extraordinary business!" ejaculated the Squire, thrusting his oaken stick under his arm, and crossing his hands meditation-wise over his chest. "When the branch was talked of at the quarter sessions, nearly a year back, the line did not come within three miles of us; not nearer, in short, than Basinghill."

"*That* was before the engineers had been at work, my dear fellow! But now all is changed; and they even talk of a station somewhere betwixt Deaswold and Darley Level!"

"God bless my soul! And pray did you notice the direction of the line through my property? Thank goodness, it cannot come *very* near the house!"

"There were so many people crowding, and inquiring, and congratulating, in Ghrimes's office," replied Jacob, whose mind was of anything but a circumstantial turn, "that I cannot be exact to a field or two. I only know that it does not touch the glebe. But, no doubt, you will get an application from Ghrimes before long."

That night, for the first time in his life, the Squire of Cromer Hall did not so much as close his eyes! Such an unexpected stroke of good fortune! El Dorado suddenly expanding at his feet! Whenever he attempted to sleep, visions floated before his mind's eye of engineers with strange instruments, mysterious to his illiterate mind as those of an alchymist or astrologer, taking levels in his valley, or piercing his hill-side with a tunnel. Had he possessed a horse strong enough to carry him twenty miles, hardly would he have abided till morning to make the best of his way to Ghrimes's office, and ascertain for how many acres of land he should be privileged to play the extortioner. But he was forced to wait till morning, for the passing of the heavy coach through Basinghill, at two miles' distance from the Hall.

"No matter!" thought he, when, as it came in sight, he surrendered the bridle of his old bay to the hands of the slovenly boy who, mounted on a half-broken colt, served him for groom. "The railroad will set all this sort of thing to rights."

"Well—who was right?" inquired his good-humoured brother, who walked to meet the coach the following day, on his return. "I don't know what you mean about *right*," was the surly rejoinder. "You told me Ghrimes would apply to me in favour of the new line." "Well?" "Well! my answer to his application was, that I should instantly petition against it." "Against the branch line through Deaswold?"

"About what other am I interested? I consider myself scandalously ill-used in the affair. Here is a railroad, about to run

right under my nose, within half a mile of a mansion which has belonged to my family from generation to generation, and to which it will cause the utmost injury and disparagement."

"Injury and disparagement to the Hall?" reiterated his astonished brother.

"And I am the last person whom these unprincipled speculators have thought proper to consult about the matter!" resumed his brother, "though my experience and knowledge of the localities would have enabled me to supply gratuitously all the information in which this pettifogging Northampton attorney is wanting."

"Don't abuse Ghrimes! Every one admits Ghrimes to be the best lawyer in the county," rejoined the Rector, a little shocked. "No one ever called Ghrimes of Northampton a pettifogger."

"I called him an impertinent ass, no later than last night,—ay, and within his hearing too, if he had chosen to take notice of it," rejoined the Squire, nettled beyond all self-control. For, alas! by virtue of some species of legerdemain which the nobility and gentry, and other landed proprietors of the county, were besotted enough to call engineering science, it had been decided by the advisers of the new company that not an acre of Squire Cromer's land should be in request! The fatal line was to run

Still out of reach, but never out of view.

Not so much as a guinea of compensation would fall to the share of the proprietor of Cromer Hall!

"Though a blind man might see the advantage of cutting direct from Basinghill through the Westwold Slopes," resumed the indignant Squire, "Ghrimes and his squad have made it convenient to run the line straight through Hutton's farm; and what with the land to be purchased there, and at Darley Level for the erection of the station, this precious "manufacturing-district" client of his,—this born-with-a-silver-ladle-in-his-mouth Mr. Mordaunt,—will net no less than thirteen thousand pounds!—*Thirteen thousand pounds*, Jacob Cromer!—of which, had I possessed a single friend in the county to advise me, every guinea ought to have gone into my own pocket! And now, pray, do you wonder at my determination to oppose the line?"

CHAPTER II.

Trade, without enlarging the British territories, has given us a kind of additional empire. It has multiplied the number of rich, made our landed estates infinitely more valuable than formerly, and added to them accessions as valuable as the lands themselves.—ADDISON.

THE irritations of body and mind experienced by Squire Cromer, while the railroad was in progress, will be readily imagined.

The influx of strange workmen into the parish, to the utter

destruction of his preserves and rabbit-warren, his fish-ponds and dovecot, served to keep his resentments perpetually green; and wondrous, indeed, must have been the convenience afforded by the rail, when opened to the public, had it sufficed to reconcile him to his previous annoyances. But the truth was that no family could benefitless by such a change than the one at Cromer Hall. So much the reverse of locomotive were their habits of life, that it was not before the Christmas vacation, that the line opened at Midsummer was available to the use of any individual of the name of Cromer, save the hearty Jacob; whereas, the complete transformation, or rather, corruption of the hitherto stagnant neighbourhood, became an immediate nuisance. Magdalen Cromer, the eldest of the Squire's three daughters, having attained her seventeenth year, was now settled at home, as "finished," and "out;" and though, in former years, the girls had been in the habit of walking constantly across the fields, to visit their little cousin Emma, at Deaswold Rectory, now that those once solitary meadows were perpetually infested by strangers, of all conditions, on their way to the Darley Station, the cousins were forced to remain at home, and apart, unless when a servant could be in attendance, or the good-natured rector serve as escort to either his daughter or niece. For his sister-in-law was too much of a Mrs. Notable to stir beyond her garden gate; while the Squire himself was never known to direct his steps into the village on a week day, unless in search of the constable to impound a stray donkey, or secure some vagrant in the cage.

"Can you tell me, papa," inquired Magdalen, at dinner, one day, after returning from a visit to her cousin, "why they are spoiling the beautiful pastures at Deasmarsh, by throwing up such immense mounds of earth?"

"Some new vagary connected with the railway, I presume," replied her father, pettishly; "in which case, Madge, I'm sure you heard no fault found with it at the Rectory! Your uncle considers everything connected with the rail a blessing to the parish!"

"The interests of his parishioners are improved by it, I believe," replied Magdalen, "which suffices to enlist my uncle as its champion. But the new works can scarcely have any connexion, papa, with the railway. They are half a mile distant from the nearest point." "Near old Smith's farm, then?" "Near *what* was his farm—the last out-house, you know, has long disappeared." "I know nothing about the matter, Magdalen. There is no object to attract *me* in that direction."

The Squire *was*, however, soon attracted in that direction. Nor was he long able to plead ignorance. Foundations for a magnificent mansion-house were actually laid at Deasmarsh. The workmen employed were from town. The materials were brought down by the railroad. But the moment the Rector exhibited an interest in the subject, the information he wished to obtain was not long a

secret. "The mansion was building for Mr. Mordaunt, the new proprietor, as his future residence; and would be finished, furnished, and inhabited, within two years' time."

"Just such taste as one might have expected from a Manchester cotton-spinner!" cried the Squire, with a gesture of angry contempt, "to build a house that might serve for a palace, in a field of half-a-dozen acres!"

Nor till, at the close of the year, he saw the hedges of a dozen adjacent meadows rooted up, the inequalities of the ground levelled in some parts, to obtain a view of the river, and clothed with plantations in others, while every tree or clump of trees that could tend to the adornment of the estate was carefully protected, could he be made to believe that the straggling old paddocks of Deasmarsh were susceptible of being converted into any thing so nearly resembling a park. When united by a ring fence with Hutton's farm, it became a handsome domain.

"If my father could but rise from his grave, and see everything about poor old Cromer Hall gone to rack and ruin!" was the seemingly pathetic cry of the Squire, two years afterwards, as he toiled up his parched paddocks to his unsightly home, after beholding Mr. Mordaunt's handsome carriage turn into his lodge-gates, towards the beautiful seat created by the large fortune amassed by his industry.

And as his complaints were addressed to one accustomed to sympathise in his feelings, or respectfully withhold her dissent—his dutiful daughter,—he escaped being told in return, as would have happened had Farmer Richards been present, that, could old Squire Cromer have foreseen that the value of his property would be increased twenty per cent. by the conversion of Deaswold into a striving and thriving parish, he would have admitted that there existed better modes of providing dowries for his daughters than by pinching a limited income, and getting the savings farmed by a country attorney.

Up to that moment, grand discussions had been carrying on in the village as to whether the Squire's family would choose to visit the new-comers, already looked down upon, as manufacturers, in a district purely agricultural; and Magdalen, who began to think that a country life might be improved by some addition to the *dramatis personæ*, would have given much for courage to inquire of her parents their intentions on the subject.

"I wonder," she at length ventured to say to her pretty little cousin, (whose mother having died during her early childhood, she had obtained, in her father's house, the ascendancy usually conceded to an only child) "I wonder, dear Emma, what change the arrival of these new people will produce among us, besides exciting envy by their succession-houses and conservatories! For the last month, papa has been more violent than I ever knew him

against what he calls upstarts and shopkeepers." "But what does *that* signify? Mr. Mordaunt is not a shopkeeper." "He does not, however, belong to one of the county families." "No, indeed, my dear Madge! Talk to him five minutes, and you will easily find it out! Except my own dear father, I never saw so pleasant or gentlemanly a man!" "You have seen him, then?" "He sent in his name yesterday, before we had finished breakfast." "And my uncle received him without hesitation?" "A clergyman and magistrate is public property, you know." "Mr. Mordaunt came on business, then?" persisted Miss Cromer. "He made his appearance, saying, he had taken the liberty of coming to pay his respects to the Rector of his parish. And thanks to my father's hearty cordial disposition, they were friends in half an hour!" "That looks well for Mr. Mordaunt;" said Magdalen, frankly. "But, I am afraid, things will not be managed quite so smoothly at the Hall. Papa has already some kind of grudge against him. Besides considering him an intruder into the neighbourhood—or, rather, that the Deasmarsh estate was bought over his head,—he has had a misunderstanding with Mr. Mordaunt's bailiff, about water-courses or something of that kind." "Oh! but that sort of rubbish will soon be got over, between such near neighbours, whose interest it is to live on friendly terms!" cried Emma.

Magdalen sighed. She was afraid not. She had begun to discover that the animosities and prepossessions of persons leading an uneventful life are apt to expand into a lazy, unwholesome exuberance, like that of fish in stagnant waters.

"But I shall be able to tell you more about them all to-morrow, my dear Madge," resumed her cousin, "for we dine at Deasmarsh this very day." "You dine at Deasmarsh to-day?" cried Miss Cromer, aghast at so rapid a progress of acquaintance. "Yes, Mr. Mordaunt said it would be the pleasantest way of presenting his whole family to our acquaintance. And papa, who took at once to a person as open-hearted as himself, did not so much as make the objection I anticipated, that I was too young to dine out. In a mere family party, he seemed to think I should not be out of place."

But it was not *that* idea which had produced Magdalen's exclamation. It had glanced into her mind that, should an intimacy be established between the Rectory and Deasmarsh, in which Cromer Hall disdained to be included, she should lose the cheerful society of her uncle and cousin; and in return, gain nothing. A sad prospect! For, as it was impossible for a girl of refined and accomplished mind to make to herself so engrossing an interest as her parents, in the petty economy of Cromer Hall, she had already discovered that the summer days were long enough to leave leisure for other diversions than solitary saunterings in the grounds, with no other response to her youthful fancies than the cawing of the rooks.

On the day after the Deasmarsh dinner-party, therefore, Magdalen took care to be betimes at the Rectory. If left to find her way to the Hall, the frank-spoken Emma would either aggravate the prejudices of her uncle and aunt by praises of the Mordaunts, or, perhaps, by some unguarded criticism, afford justification for their antipathy.

"And how did you like Deasmarsh?" said she, coming straight to the point, on finding Emma alone.

"A palace—a perfect palace!" cried the elated child. "So little as I have seen out of this village, it is not wonderful that *I* should be charmed. But my father who, in former days, *did* knock a little about the world, declares that no nobleman's seat could be more richly furnished, or establishment more perfectly appointed."

"I am sorry to hear it," was Magdalen's grave reply. "I want to like the Mordaunt's; and surely it is bad taste in people of their class to set up in opposition to the aristocracy?"

"How like that is to my uncle and aunt!" cried Emma, clapping her hands. "Fie, Madge, fie! People of *their* class! People of *what* class? All we know about the Mordaunts, is that they are enormously rich."

"And that their wealth was obtained in trade, and doubled by railway speculation," persisted Magdalen. "It is not *that* I find fault with; but that they should not understand the fitness of things too well to enter into rivalry with dukes and lords."

"Pho, pho! Dukes and lords have fine curtains and carpets, and beautiful chairs, tables, and plate in their houses, not because they are lords and dukes, but because they are *rich*!" pleaded little Emma, having laid down her work in the heat of her argument; "and on that point, if Mr. Mordaunt is able to contend with them, why not, pray?"

"At all events, if *disposed* to contend with them," rejoined Miss Cromer, "he will find *us* quite below his sphere."

"Now, Madge,—now, Madge! When you know that you and the whole family at the Hall look down upon Deasmarsh as—"

"The Hall certainly looks down upon Deasmarsh," rejoined her cousin, with a forced smile, "as well as upon half the parish of Deaswold. But *that* does not imply *hauteur* towards the inhabitants. Tell me, however, dear cousin, something more about our new neighbours."

"In the first place, then, there is Mr. Mordaunt, an open-hearted, open-handed man, such as my father would have been if equally rich; with a wife a little stately, but nearly as agreeable and sensible as himself. The eldest son (Reresby, they call him,) has not yet made his appearance; but there is a picture of him in the dining-room, which proves his horse and dog to be the handsomest ever seen, and the young man, though the least good-looking of the trio, far from a fright. He will do very well, in short,

Madge, for you and I (and Emily and Mary when they come home to take part in our fight) to pull caps about."

"If papa could but hear you! The Cromers of Cromer Hall pulling caps for the son of a cotton-spinner! The ten pages we occupy in Burke's Landed Gentry would certainly be inflicted upon you as a task!"

"And a pretty severe one, considering how tiresome I find the family genealogy when recited piecemeal by my uncle!"

"But surely, Emma, I saw a younger face than Mr. Mordaunt's in the family-pew last Sunday?" inquired Magdalen.

"You *did* take a peep then, Miss Cromer of Cromer Hall, at the family of the cotton-spinner? Well—well—I *know*!—I do not *really* suppose you to be inoculated with the family prejudices by living under the same roof with the family plate and pictures! There *is* a daughter, and alas! nearer your age than mine."

Already Magdalen's face began to brighten. "A most beautiful girl I thought her, when first introduced to her by her father, who seemed determined that we should be friends," added Emma.

"And had you so soon occasion to change your opinion?"

"No, I still think her beautiful. But not pleasing—not ingratiating—not near so good-looking as *you*, Magdalen."

A deep blush, and a faint ejaculation of "*me!*" proved that even experience had not inured the grave Magdalen to the wild sallies of her cousin.

"In short, coz,—for you know how I hate to have anything on my mind—in short, I suspect we shall find Matilda Mordaunt the least agreeable of the family. I'm sadly afraid she is—" Instead of finishing her sentence, the young lady demurely resumed her work.

"She is—*what?*"

"I hardly like to pronounce the word, convinced as I am that it is what you all expected of the Mordaunts."

"*Vulgar*, perhaps?"

"Worse!—the superlative of vulgarity,—*purse-proud!* Nothing can be handsomer than her face, or more elegant than her appearance. But there she sat, silent and surly; as if, after detecting the coarseness of my poor unfortunate muslin frock, she had scarcely patience to turn her head my way."

"This is a sad account!" said Magdalen, with a face of concern.

"If it had not been that Mr. Mordaunt was at the pains to talk a good deal to me," rejoined the parson's daughter, "having no end of inquiries to make about the village and neighbourhood, I should have passed as dull an evening as I used at the Hall, Madge, before you returned home."

An uplifted finger purported to remind the lively Emma of her cousin's often-repeated warning against including the house of all the Cromers in her playful strictures.

"Mr. Mordaunt and my darling daddy," continued she, without seeming to notice the interdiction, "had of course worlds of business to discuss about railroad shares, and poor's-rates. At last, we overheard them reach from the village to the Hall; and Mr. Mordaunt did not so much as lower his clear ringing voice to observe, 'I find I am sadly out of Mr. Cromer's good books. My friend Ghymes prepared me to find him hostilely disposed; and this stupid squabble of Wilkes's, concerning the water-meadows, is likely to create a permanent misunderstanding between us; unless, indeed, my dear sir, I may trust to your kindly interposition to place us upon a more neighbourly footing.'—'Depend upon me—depend upon me,' cried my father. 'As parish priest, to heal grievances is part of my calling, and for the sake of my brother's family, I shall lose no time in promoting an acquaintance with yours. I have a charming niece, as accomplished as she is amiable, who would be a great acquisition to Miss Mordaunt.'"

"And what did Miss Mordaunt say to such a suggestion?" inquired Magdalen, with a still more vivid blush than before.

"It was not her cue to speak, for it was not *her* my father was addressing. But I caught a glimpse of her face."

"And it did not look, I am afraid, as if she thought I *should* be an acquisition?" said Magdalen, with a faint smile.

"She looked, at all events, my dear Madge, as if she would be no acquisition to *you*! Never in my life did I behold a more forbidding countenance."

"I am satisfied!" cried Magdalen, kissing the forehead of her young companion. "If I have not gained a friend by the arrival of the family of Deasmarsh, at least I have not lost my little cousin."

CHAPTER III.

Rapiere, or Toledo, or other good blade of gentile purpose, would be counted useless among his implemantes.—SIR THOMAS OVERBURY.

MORDAUNT of Deasmarsh was what Necker called Napoleon—*l'homme nécessaire*—to promote the regeneration of a decaying country. From the moment of acquiring property in the parish of Deaswold, he had made its interests his own. While his person was still unknown there, not an acre of its land or fathom of its water but was familiar to him. Long on the watch for a more considerable purchase, no sooner did he foresee the probability that old Smith's farm would lie at his disposal than, by his activity in the organization of a branch railway in which he became a considerable shareholder, he bespoke such a direction of the line as at once to benefit the property of the company and his own. A prosperous capitalist, unencumbered by hereditary engagements

or obligations, enabled to will and do, both by strength of mind and strength of pocket, he chose to establish himself at a distance from Burtsmill, ten miles distant from Manchester, where his independence had been accomplished; not from false shame at the origin of his fortune, but became resolved to devote the remainder of his life to the enjoyment of the fruits of his industry.

"Had I settled in Lancashire, or within distance of my old place," said he frankly, in accounting for himself to his neighbour of the Rectory, "I should have been always interfering, or longing to interfere; which, now that I have become a sleeping partner, with the right of introducing hereafter my son into the firm, would only have created jealousies. And I preferred creating a new place, to purchasing the seat of some decayed family, from the same dislike of being the origin of heartburnings. I hate to step into another man's shoes."

It would have been cruel on the part of Jacob Cromer unnecessarily to apprise his new friend what fierce heartburnings he had occasioned to the lord of the manor of Deaswold; and Mr. Mordaunt was consequently able to resume:

"It was always the object of my hopes, and a great spur to my industry," said he, "to realize such a capital as would enable me to retire from business and enjoy the world like a gentleman, before I had dwindled down into a 'lean and slippered pantaloon;' and, by God's will, my wish has prospered. Freshley, my former partner, was luckily both willing and able to buy me out of the business within a fourth of my share; and in a couple of years, even *that* will be at my disposal, if I find sufficient profit and charm in a country life to wish my son, as well as myself, to devote himself exclusively to the duties of a landed proprietor.

In the course of further conversation, it came out that this fourth of Mr. Mordaunt's fortune amounted to eighty thousand pounds; a sum which justified the worthy parson in congratulating himself that the poor of his parish had obtained so opulent a patron.

Unafflicted, by right of primogeniture, with the feudal instincts rendering the subordination of his tenants and the power of extracting the greatest number of pounds sterling from the acres of the family estate the chief object of his life, Jacob was too good a Christian not to rejoice at finding the rate of agricultural wages raised in the district, at once by the operation of the railroad and the extension of agricultural improvements introduced by the rich capitalist; and too open-hearted to the interests of his fellow-creatures to experience more than momentary mortification at finding the autocracy of his forefathers converted into a divided empire. The results of Mr. Mordaunt's domiciliation at Deasmarsh reconciled him to the eclipse of Cromer Hall; and the advantages derived from the railway by the whole country round, silenced his repinings after his rural privacy of former years.

But, whether as regarded the present or the past, matters were otherwise viewed at the Hall. The grievance of the water-courses became established as a cause of feud for ever and aye, the moment the Squire found his labourers deserting him for the service of the new comer. It was in vain that Jacob advocated the establishment of peace between the belligerents. "Mr. Mordaunt," he assured his brother, "was a sensible man—a well-intentioned man—a man guided solely by a sense of duty—and, above all, open to argument. For their mutual interest, if not for their mutual satisfaction, therefore, it was desirable that a good understanding should subsist between such near neighbours." But the Squire would not be entreated. "No—he knew what he was about. He was not going to play second fiddle to any man in Deaswold. Mr. Mordaunt might look into the parish charters if he liked, and see what the Cromer family had been there in the time of Henry VII." A hint which rendered it difficult to Jacob, who, being somewhat more of a clerk than his elder brother, knew precisely what benefit the Cromer family had derived from church pillage in the reign of Henry VIII. to refrain from a smile.

"Mordaunt has no need to look at the parish charters, my dear John," said he, soothingly, "to learn that he must be always secondary here to the lord of the manor. Nor has he, believe me, the smallest disposition to encroach upon any of your rights."

"Thank him for nothing! Because he can't! The law will take care of *that*?"

"But it will have a sinecure; for I never saw a man more conscientiously inclined to confine himself within equitable bounds. It was only yesterday, when we were talking over the restoration of my chancel, towards which, in consideration of the pew allotted to Deasmarsh—"

"Ay—and what business had the vestry to allot it, I should like to know?"—interrupted the Squire, in a tone to which his brother judiciously turned a deaf ear.

"Towards which," continued Jacob, "he has made so munificent a donation; he was the first to observe, while pointing to our family achievements, many of which are so tattered and torn that they will scarcely hang by the wall—"

"You're not going to sacrifice the trophies of the Cromer family to this cotton-spinning fellow?" interrupted the Squire, with a face almost livid with rage.—"On the contrary, my dear John. I was in the act of relating to you that Mordaunt was the first to suggest the propriety of having them carefully repaired."

"Burnished up and begilt, like a sign-post, by some Birmingham candlestick-maker—some cousin, perhaps, of his own!"

"I said—that is *he* said—*repaired*, not restored!" mildly remonstrated the Rector. "The object Mordaunt had in view would be defeated by rendering them ridiculous."

"And what object or business of any kind has he, pray, with the Cromer achievements?"

"A desire to impress upon the minds of his poorer neighbours, by symbols which have existed before their eyes from generation to generation, for ages past, that the rights exercised over them are stable as those of the throne; and that those Deaswolders who fear God, and honour the king, should also respect the family from whose ancestors their forefathers obtained bread."

"I don't believe he intended anything of the kind!" was the surly retort of the Squire. "Far more likely that he wished the people hereabouts to see, in those tattered and tarnished relics, the appropriate representation of a decayed family!"

"But our family is *not* decayed," pleaded his brother. "We are all we ever were. Not an acre of the Cromer estate, my dear John, has ever been alienated. The necessity of providing for younger children may have prevented enterprise or improvement tending to *augment* the rent-roll; but—"

"You will not deny, I suppose, that for the future the possessor of Deasmarsh, whoever he may be (for a fortune made in trade may be lost in trade, and the present proprietor go to the dogs, from whence, I believe, he came), will be the first man in this neighbourhood?"

"A necessary consequence of the progress of times, my dear brother, and no offence on the part of Mr. Mordaunt. Trade and speculation have levelled a thousand distinctions. The House of Commons is full of manufacturers, who, half a century hence, if another William Pitt should arise, will many of them be in the House of Peers; and how can we expect to keep an insignificant nook of Northamptonshire free from the influence of a class which has found its way to the foot of the throne?"

"I'll tell you what, Jacob," cried the Squire, unable to contain his angry feelings, "if *you* have lost all sense of family pride, *I* have *not*. Into one house of the insignificant nook of Northamptonshire which you choose to disparage, this fellow—this cotton-spinner—shall never set his foot!"

"I am sorry for it—I am heartily sorry for it," rejoined his brother. "Of course, I can do no more towards mitigating your determination than by giving you my sincere opinion (as I feel bound to do, both as a brother and spiritual pastor) that since we *were* to have a rich neighbour at Deasmarsh, we are lucky indeed to have obtained one so wise and upright as Mordaunt; and I think it also fair to add, that I hope to see a great deal of him, both in his house and my own; and that any personal offence offered to him will, unless I see cause to alter my opinion of his character, only prompt me to treat him with higher consideration."

While Jacob was quitting the cheerless, naked room, which, at Cromer Hall, assumed the name of study, after this manly decla-

ration, till the sound of the Hall door closing after him warned his brother of his departure, the heart of the angry Squire continued to swell, almost to bursting, within his narrow breast.

"Spiritual pastor, indeed!"—at length escaped his lips—"As if a black coat entitled a brother five years younger than myself to come and lay down the law to me in my own house! And the more I keep the cotton-spinner at bay, forsooth, the more cringing and obsequious the parson intends to be! My humble service to you, Reverend Mr. Jacob Cromer! It is as well, at least, to know your intentions. Ungrateful fellow! After all I have done for him! My wife, who, since the death of *his*, has been as good as a mother to his minx of a girl! And now, because a vulgar upstart from Manchester has bought his way into the neighbourhood, who can give him claret and pineapple instead of port and pippins, he turns his back upon his brother, his *own* brother, his only brother! But the black coats are all alike, as sneaking as rapacious! I never saw the churchman who might not be bribed over by loaves and fishes. The Deasmarsh cotton-spinner knew what he was about when he made his first visit to the Rectory. Jacob would go through fire and water for one whom, *otherwise*, he would have been glad to see thrown into them."

That Mordaunt had paid his respects at the Rectory before he paid them at the Hall was, in fact, the crowning offence to those offered by his bricklayers and drainers.

"But my uncle assures me, dear papa," pleaded Magdalen, when this transpired in his family, "that Mr. Mordaunt expressly stated his desire to call upon you, as a neighbour, as soon as he was satisfied that you would not consider it a liberty, it being your place as the superior to call first; whereas, he waited on my uncle simply as a parishioner."

"Ay, ay! it sounds plausible enough!" was all the anxious girl could obtain in reply. "But, mark my words, Magdalen, that Jacob will live to be insulted by the purse-proud upstart, who, sooner or later, will prove a firebrand in this hitherto quiet district."

No one better understood the duty of passive obedience than the daughter of Mr. Cromer. But, though she gave up the task of defending one who had committed no offence, she did not the less regret the loss of Deasmarsh, both for her parents' sake and her own.

"Let us say no more about the matter," said Mordaunt to the Rector, who was endeavouring to make awkward excuses for the churlishness of his brother. "I must trust to some of the chances of country neighbourhood to establish me in Mr. Cromer's better opinion; till when, it may be as well that the name of neither party be mentioned to the other—the surest way of letting personal grievances die a natural death."

This was somewhat difficult. For to the schemes of village be-

nevolence suggested by the experience of the pastor, and prospered by the wealth of the manufacturer, the consent of the Squire was often wanting.

"Do what you choose," was his letter of license to his brother, conscious in how odious a light he should place himself by opposition of such a nature, "anything sooner than place me in contact with a man of whom I am resolved to know nothing."

And thus, however little Cromer Hall might benefit by the creation of the new seat, the village at least was the gainer; and thrive and thrive, and grew neater, and brighter, and wiser, and happier, albeit a blockhead was lord of the manor. The schoolhouses, to which he contributed nothing, were not the less frequented; and the cottage gardens of Deaswold were as pleasant to look at, with their flush of stocks and carnations, as if indebted to the Hall for the premiums securing their emulation.

But it is not to be supposed that, because the Squire affected to see and hear nothing that was going on, he was either blind or deaf to the growing influence of the Man of Capital. If he did not see it, he inferred it by an inward pang of mortification, which is the sixth sense of the selfish. He felt that something great and good was abiding near him, which made his littleness appear more little. His insignificance being every way demonstrated by the superiorities of Deasmarsh, he was forced to console himself by thanking Heaven, twenty times a-day, for a thing wherein Heaven had little part—namely, the predominance of the Cromer achievements in the chancel of the old church, and the permanence of the Cromer records in the archives of the old deed-chest. But still, the torments of the envious Haman were not the less his daily portion. The special favour of Heaven, indeed seemed to fall on the lands and havings of his rival. Abel's sacrifice was accepted. It might be, indeed, that the superior system of husbandry adopted by the man of the day, who was not above learning from books all that is to be gathered from the experience of others, was the cause of his fuller crops and more thriving plantations. But so it was, that "the oldest inhabitant" of the parish could not remember having seen such harvests as covered the leas of Mr. Mordaunt: while even the oldest inhabitants of the county were fain to admit that no one who overlooked the green domain of Deasmarsh would have suspected the recency of its creation. The belts were so judiciously planted, the traces of the hedges so completely obliterated, the grass so well laid down, the waters of the widened stream so abounding! To glance from those depths of verdure up the parched and almost naked hill-side where Cromer Hall stood alone in its ugliness, like an untoward child in disgrace, or a leper-house of the olden time, was almost a sufficient excuse for the soured temper of its proprietor, and the uncharitableness of his feelings towards the Mordaunts.

The lapse of two whole years served indeed rather to aggravate than soften his antipathies ; nay, nothing but the unconquerable good-humour of Jacob Cromer prevented the Rectory from being included in the interdict laid upon Deasmarsh. For when the master of a family evinces a disposition to be at variance with one of his neighbours, active hands bearing pickaxes and spades are never wanting to assist in widening the breach ; and not a week of the hundred and four which had elapsed since Mordaunt took possession of his place, but was embittered by some imaginary trespass, reported as committed by his people or the people of the railroad. The Squire's cottagers were not slow in discovering that, let them remove what hedge-stakes or open what water-slucies they might, so long as they contrived to make it appear that the aggression came from Deasmarsh, they were safe from molestation ; and Joe Wilkes, a cunning old bailiff, who had been picking a scanty livelihood for the last thirty years by mal-administration of the meagre Cromer property, found that his gains were doubled by actively administering to the enmities of his master. Many a time did he delude the poor Squire into keeping watch with him through the night, for poachers whose depredations he declared to be committed in concert with railway guards, by whom the game was forwarded to town, or sold to the housekeeper at Deasmarsh, Mr. Mordaunt, with so limited a property in the county, and a lord of the manor so unpropitious, making no attempt to preserve his game. But the vigils of the malicious pair were infructuous. All that the Squire ever caught was a severe cold. Deasmarsh was not to be found tripping. It bestowed its blankets and chaldrons of coals on the poor of the parish. It paid a neighbouring apothecary for administering to their ailments. It progressed in the sight of God and man, but without making itself amenable to the law by infringement of the smallest statute enforceable by Cromer of Cromer Hall.

Magdalen, meanwhile, consoled herself for her loss in the society of a family so worthy as the Mordaunts, by noting the delicacy of feeling with which Emma, in her rapid progress towards womanhood, abstained from profiting as fully as she might have done by the general invitation of their new neighbour, lest her cousin should feel neglected.

"Don't praise me, Madge," cried she, when warmly thanked for her thoughtfulness, "or you will place me under the necessity of sparing my own blushes by more frequent visits to Deasmarsh. I assure you I go there whenever my interests require it : that is, whenever an importation of new books and music from town, or some rare flower in bloom in the conservatory, tempts me to overcome my idleness."

"Don't talk so ! You know that *such* considerations never yet influenced either you or my uncle," said Miss Cromer.

"What other attraction do you think likely to draw me to Deasmarsh? Mrs. Mordaunt is busy, as in foundership of a family bound, improving her acquaintance with the great people of the county; Matilda remains the same silent repellent personage I first thought her; and the handsome son is Heaven knows where, touring and making-believe to improve himself in foreign parts. Till *his* arrival, therefore, I make small proof of self-denial in not living at Deasmarsh all the days of the week on which the Mordaunts profess a kind desire to make me welcome."

"I shall not be the less pleased," rejoined her cousin, "when my sisters are settled at home, to release you from the generous self-sacrifice to which you condemn yourself for the sake of securing me a companion."

But, alas! for Magdalen, the event to which she thus alluded was fated not to be. While the affectionate eldest sister was exercising her skill and industry, and exhausting her girlish funds to adorn the rooms adjoining her own, destined for the use of the two girls, the health of Emily, the second sister, seriously impaired by an attack of scarlet fever, from which both had suffered, gave indications of rapid decline. Instead of returning home for the enjoyment of the family union so long looked forward to, the Squire was apprized by a letter from an eminent London physician that the removal of his family to a southern climate afforded the sole chance of preserving her life. To Clifton, accordingly, the Cromers repaired for the winter; but only to see the invalid sink into an untimely grave. Nor even when her sufferings were terminated by death, were the cares of the family at an end: Magdalen being the first to observe that her surviving sister, either infected by close attendance on the sufferer, or from bearing in her constitution the germ of the same insidious disease, was languishing even unto death. The close confinement of a too laborious education had destroyed those ill-fated country girls! Scarcely was the spring beginning to be green, which, in their cheerless London imprisonment, they had so often dreamed of enjoying together at Deaswold with their dear Magdalen, when poor Mary was laid beside her sister, in a spot which has witnessed the premature blighting of so many delicate blossoms.

Their uncle Jacob, when summoned from home to solemnize the last rite over the remains of his nieces, pleaded strongly, that they might be conveyed back to their old home, to rest amid kindred dust. But his brother would not hear of it. The Squire pronounced it to be a useless waste of money.

"Their winter at Clifton," he said, "had already cost him an enormous sum."

The Rector could not bring himself to remind this sordid parent that an undertaker's bill was the last charge he would ever incur on their account!—He contented himself, while mingling his tears

over poor Mary's remains with those of the surviving niece, who felt it so hard to leave them deserted among strangers ;—rendering thanks to God, in the silence of his heart, for having tempered the wind to his own shorn lamb—the child in whom his soul delighted.

The idea of what it would have been to him to consign the remains of his darling Emma to an untimely grave, seemed to apprise him, as by sudden discovery, of her all-in-all importance to his happiness!

CHAPTER IV.

Cel. I pray thee, Rosalind, sweet my coz, be merry.

Ros. Dear Celia, I show more mirth than I am mistress of. But I will forget the condition of my estate, to rejoice in yours.

SHAKESPEARE.

THOUGH, during the absence of the Cromer family from the Hall, a constant correspondence was kept up between Magdalen and her cousin, the deference of feeling experienced by Emma towards the feelings of one who was watching over the death-bed of a sister, prevented her alluding to the lighter topics occupying her attention. Even after their return to Northamptonshire, the deep mourning worn by Magdalen, and the pious abstraction into which her mind had fallen after witnessing scenes so affecting, prevented her cousin from endeavouring to wean her from her griefs. Of Deasmarsh she said nothing; and Magdalen inquired as little. The great gap created in her narrow domestic circle by her recent loss, occupied Miss Cromer's whole attention. The closed-up rooms of poor Emily and Mary prevented her listening with undivided attention even to her cousin's account of the health of her rustic protégés, and the new spinning-school instituted under the auspices of Mrs. Mordaunt. As yet, indeed, Magdalen had not dared to enter the village of Deaswold. She knew by experience the lack of delicacy with which the poor demonstrate their sympathy by straightforward questions; and could not bear to be subjected to inquiries concerning the sufferings and last moments of the poor girls. She was consequently still ignorant that the Mordaunts had acquired in the county a far higher degree of personal consideration than was conceded to the shallow gentility and penurious hospitality of the Hall. In any county, in every metropolis, a man of ten thousand a-year, unblemished character, and intelligent mind, works his way to public respect. But when, as in the instance of Mr. Mordaunt, a pleasant, gentlemanly companion as well as a benevolent Christian, whose good-Samaritanism has been ripened into the fullest expansion by the sunshine of his lot, room is readily made for him in a country neighbourhood, where he constitutes a second providence.

All and more than all that the Squire had predicted, in short,

was come to pass. The village saw pretty clearly that Cromer of Cromer Hall was no longer its top-sawyer; while under the hospitable roof of Deasmarsh there assembled a higher order of the estated magnates of Northamptonshire than had been conciliated into acquaintanceship by the ill-tempered pride and shabby ways of the Squire. By degrees, as Magdalen grew a little more cheerful, all this became as apparent to *her* as to her cousin. She learned from Emma that Lord and Lady Melfont and their son had spent several days at Deasmarsh, in the course of the winter; and then and there the Rector and his daughter had become acquainted with the family of Sir William Settringham, to whom they had since been on a visit at Settringham Abbey, to meet the Mordaunts and the Lord Lieutenant of the county.

"There were charades and proverbs going on every evening at the Abbey, in which, had I been in better spirits, I should have joined," observed Emma; "for Mr. Settringham and his mother obtained leave from papa!"

"And was it as pleasant at the Abbey as at Deasmarsh?" inquired Magdalen, unwilling that her little cousin should fancy her wholly indifferent to her pleasures.

"Oh! *nothing*, you know, can be as pleasant as Deasmarsh—nothing, *nothing* so pleasant as Deasmarsh!"—cried the enthusiastic girl. "At Deasmarsh, everything is so fresh—so new—so good—so well selected!"

It was not for Magdalen to hint that, in the eyes of many, such freshness and newness constituted an objection.

"Settringham is a venerable place!" was all Miss Cromer ventured to observe. "I saw it but once, in a formal morning visit. But the fine old gateway and its ivy made a strong impression."

"In *my* opinion, dilapidated gateways and ivy bushes are better for owls than human creatures;" replied Emma, discerning at once the slur cast by inference upon her favourite spot. "I found nearly the same persons collected at Settringham as at Deasmarsh—and six times as much effort was made to entertain them; yet everybody admitted the Mordaunts' party to have been far more agreeable."

"My uncle speaks of Mr. Settringham as a young man of extraordinary promise!" said Magdalen in an apologetic tone.

"Yes; I believe he is wonderfully clever. But such a prig—such a pedant—such a bore! Reresby Mordaunt declares that Mr. Settringham always appears to be reviewing what one says, as he would review a book in the Quarterly."

"Mr. Mordaunt is come home, then?"

"Reresby? Oh! he arrived before you left the country."

"Indeed? Unless from *you*, we never hear what goes on at Deasmarsh. And do you find him as much of an acquisition as you expected?" inquired Magdalen, with a melancholy smile—as

she recalled to mind the contention predicted by Emma with her three cousins, for the preference of the cotton-spinner's heir.

"The most amusing companion, the most obliging neighbour in the world!" replied Emma. "Thanks to *him*, Magdalen, poor little frightened foolish thing as you left me, I have become a famous horsewoman. But he has been in town for the last month. As soon as you came back, he went to London for the season." "*Because* we came back?" "To say the truth, partly. I warned him and his sister that, for some weeks to come, they would see nothing of me; that I should be always here, unless when I should induce you to come to the Rectory." "Which sufficed to keep *them* away!" "They were of course aware that you would be little inclined, just now, for the company of strangers." "You speak of 'they,' Emma, as though Miss Mordaunt had turned out as charming as her brother?"

"Much more so! It was for Matilda's sake, I first endeavoured to like Reresby—whose flighty ways, on our first acquaintance, rather alarmed me." "Then you no longer think her purse-proud?" "Hush, hush! If you know how ashamed I feel that such a word should ever have escaped my lips!"

"Now you have told me so, dearest cousin, depend upon it, I shall never remind you of your former opinion," replied Magdalen, kindly. "It was not an *opinion*, Madge; it was an ignorant girl's foolish mistake. I found Matilda silent and reserved, and hastily judged that she must be proud." "And what *was* she then?" "Shy! a fault we discover at once in children, yet never suspect in grown-up people, who are quite as liable to the failing! Matilda was afraid of me—yes,—absurd as it may seem, afraid of a little trumpery girl of fifteen! The unkind things said in all directions by my uncle about manufacturers and cotton-spinners were duly reported to the Mordaunts, the moment they arrived; and Matilda was prepared to find in everything of the name of Cromer contempt, either open or secret, of her and hers."

"And of course you soon undeceived her?"

"Prejudices are not destroyed in a day. Each thought the other proud; and, holding back as I did from the acquaintance, so long as you were here, lest it should interfere, dearest Madge, with our happiness in being together, Matilda was justified in supposing me as cold as I fancied herself. However, I soon discovered that whatever her faults of manner, she was an excellent creature; possessing a thousand accomplishments of which she thought nothing: and doing good from morning till night, of which she chose that others should know nothing; and so I learned to admire and respect her. And when Reresby came, and I saw her in the company of her brother, where she was perfectly at ease, I soon recanted my former errors."

"You learned to love each, in short, for the sake of the other?"

"Very nearly. At least, each served as interpreter to the other; and now I perfectly understand them both."

Magdalen was unable to suppress a sigh. It seemed hard that the blessing of such friendship should have fallen to the lot of Emma; who, though sisterless as the will of Providence had lately rendered herself, possessed in her father the warmest and truest of friends. Whereas the Squire and his wife lived on terms of such Darby-and-Joanish unanimity as to create a barrier of reserve between themselves and their children. Even the solace afforded to poor Magdalen, by looking forward to the settlement at home of her elder brother, when Robert proceeded to Cambridge for the completion of his education, was extinguished shortly after the re-establishment of the family in Northamptonshire.

With a family of five children, the Squire had decided a college education, if indispensable to the future incumbent of Deaswold, to be by no means wanting for the Squire apparent. But now that Magdalen alone survived of the three daughters for whom his penurious economy had laid by a sum of nearly twenty thousand pounds, he began to perceive the possibility of allowing the two brothers to share at the university the same advantages as at Rugby. For two or three years to come, therefore, Stephen would be only occasionally at home.

Unluckily, however, the diminution of the claims both upon the personalty and income of the Squire, had other results besides procuring a better education for his eldest son. In a moment of great enlargement of soul, or great exacerbation of spite, he intimated an intention to repair and beautify the Hall! As though the loss of his two promising daughters were a relief, he hastily resolved to lay out a part of their portions in whitewash and red paint. All was to be restored in its glaring pristine ugliness; and when Magdalen suggested a timid inquiry whether, now that the workmen were on the premises, it would cost much more to have the new-pointing and picking-out of the glowing façade converted into white stucco, so as to render the house a less staring object to the country round, Mr. Cromer resented it as an insult. "Deasmarsh (which he concluded was the object of rivalry) was built of stone: *his* house, of humble brick,—and brick he chose it to remain. He did not wish to shine under false pretences. In *his* opinion, stucco was a contemptible subterfuge." On the same ground, he refused to have his hall and dining-room painted to represent oak. "The old panelling was deal,—mere deal,—and why should it affect to be anything else by false colours?" Rather than avail himself of the facilities of the railroad, he even allowed a Northampton paper-hanger to disfigure his walls by papers rejected as too gaudy even by the railroad hotels; serving to render doubly apparent the shabbiness of the old furniture partially and

hideously renovated by the application of lacquered trophies and gaudy mouldings; while the carpets, which he maintained to be beautiful by citing the amount of the country upholsterer's bills by whom they were supplied, were precisely such as are seen suspended from the window of some Kidderminster warehouse in High Holborn.

"I did not think (forgive me, dear papa) that the old place *could* be made more ugly than it used to be," whispered Emma to the Rector, as they walked home together across the fields, after a survey of all this flimsy finery. "Not a single additional comfort! Not one of the new inventions for making people warmer in winter and cooler in summer than their forefathers, such as one sees at Deasmarsh!"

"The chief object of my brother," replied the ever-extenuating Jacob, "appears to have been to place the Hall in substantial repair."

"Unluckily!—For there is now no chance of so great an eyesore to the country tumbling down in our time!"

"Remember, my dear," remonstrated the Rector, "that I was born under its roof."

"I did, indeed, for a moment forget it!" cried Emma, fondly clinging to his arm, and pressing her head to his shoulder, while her light steps had a hard matter to keep pace with his sturdy pace. "But you are so unlike anything connected, in *my* time, with the name of Cromer Hall, dearest father, that I cannot help sometimes—"

"Emma!" again reprovingly exclaimed the peace-making Rector: and again his daughter admitted herself to be in the wrong, and promised amendment.

"Since you wish it," said she, "I will even try to find beauty in the scarlet carpets and peagreen paper of the frightful old parlour."

"For Magdalen's sake, rather than mine, you should overlook mere errors of taste," was his grave rejoinder.

"What would I *not* do for the sake of the dearest, best, and most self-denying creature in the world!" cried his daughter. "But admit that, with eyes accustomed to Deasmarsh, it is difficult not to be shocked by the glaring coarseness of taste exhibited at the Hall!"

The Squire and his wife, however, to whom the possibility of regenerating the old place was so unexpected as almost to neutralize their family affliction, could scarcely restrain their feelings of triumph in contemplating the result; and the air of modest deprecation under which Mr. Cromer endeavoured to conceal his vain-gloriousness while pointing out from Basinghill, to his spinster neighbours the Miss Moulseys, what Reresby Mordaunt took the liberty of describing "as that very alarming case of scarlet fever," added a new trait of absurdity to his character.

"Laugh at the Hall—laugh at the place—laugh at its practices; laugh even (if you laugh in your sleeve) at my uncle and aunt," said Emma, in reply to the quizzing of her travelled friend; "for I am not afraid that your sarcasm should extend to the parsonage or parson; both being too simple, genuine, and unpretending, to provoke the scorn of even the most wanton jester. But not a word, if you please, Mr. Mordaunt, against Magdalen—not a single word against Magdalen! First, because I love her as myself: secondly, because if you *could* find in her anything to be severe upon, I should have no further hope of clemency."

"And why not extend your prohibitions to my sister?" inquired young Mordaunt, who admired the affectionate nature of Emma as much as her glossy curls and hazel eyes.

"Because Matilda laughs at nobody. Matilda is as full of mercy as of justice!" said Emma, turning towards Miss Mordaunt. "Shall I ever forget her tender-heartedness during the illness of my poor cousins, whom she had never seen and whose parents have shown themselves so ungracious, only because she saw me unhappy!"

"I don't wonder!" rejoined Reresby. "Tears in such eyes as yours appear unnatural. Beings of *your* kind are created to feel and dispense nothing but happiness."

Considering the tone and look with which the sentiment was uttered, it was scarcely to be wondered at that his sister should consider it prudent to adhere closely to the side of the young couple during the remainder of their saunter through the beautiful coppices of Deasmarsh. For though her father's projects and ambitions for the settlement in life of his son had never been expressly confided to her, enough had transpired concerning them in her presence previous to her brother's return from the Mediterranean, to convince her that, however great the respect of Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt for the Rector of Deaswold, it was not their intention to encourage an attachment between his daughter and their son.

On the contrary, when describing to Reresby the offences to which he had been subjected by the lord of the manor, Mr. Mordaunt observed with a smile—"He has a handsome daughter, they tell me, with whom you must not take it into your head to fall in love. For, even if I had not other views, my dear Reresby, for your establishment in life, no earthly consideration would induce me to sanction the intermarriage of one of my children with one of the Cromers."

CHAPTER V.

He speaks! The lake in front becomes a lawn;
Woods vanish, hills subside, and valleys rise;
And streams, as if created for his use,
Pursue the track of his directing wand,
Sinuous or straight—now rapid and now slow,
Now murmuring soft—now roaring in cascades,
Even as he bids.

COWPER.

It is one of the cant sayings of England, where the success of commercial enterprise has created family seats such as, in former centuries, owed their origin to the strong arm of the warrior or cunning spoliation of the courtier—that such and such a place is “a fine place enough, but horribly *new*!” As if, apart from historical association, there existed charms in a weather-stained wall, or the irregularities of a structure the barbarous growth of succeeding ages.

Few people, however, who have abided in such an establishment as that of Deasmarsh, find courage to repeat the charge. The most moss-grown of venerable castles can ill compare with a mansion whose ease and comfort is perfected by the means and appliances of modern science; where nothing old is to be met with but the pictures on the wall, the wines in the cellar, and the friends collected to enjoy them. It was this that constituted the charm of Mr. Mordaunt's household. All was smooth—all without let or hindrance. Everything was constructed on the best principles. The windows opened wider and shut closer than any other windows in the county. The slightest touch of a bell brought precisely the servant that was wanted. All was according to the enactments of this age of progress. All was “on an improved principle.”

That the system worked well at Deasmarsh was demonstrated in the good humour of its inmates. The Mordaunts were really happy people, because they could have been so without all these accessories; and were, nevertheless, wise enough to know themselves happier *with*. Through life, everything had prospered with them; but prosperity had not hardened their hearts. They were too conscious of the happiness they derived from the beneficence of Providence not to understand the duty of dispensing to others a portion of their contentment. The only fault of Mr. Mordaunt was that, instigated by his own strength of mind and firmness of purpose, he could never be made to conceive an obstacle to plans sagely conceived and deliberately matured; and, if his wise and prudent mate were disposed to make greater allowance for the alloy of this world's weakness in the conduct of other people, it was because the tenderness of the mother had somewhat mollified the rigid justice of the wife.

"Don't suppose that because, to complete Reresby's education according to the modern system of things, I have given him the run of the world since he left college, I mean to release him from bit and bridle, and let him lead a life of idleness," was the observation of the master of Deasmarsch to Mrs. Mordaunt, shortly before the return from the continent of his son. "No, no!—I worked my own way through the early part of my life, and he must work also; not as *I* did, not as Tom will do, for sordid gain. Reresby's labours will be of a more satisfactory nature. I mean to place him in parliament. The account they gave me of him at Cambridge, when I visited Trinity to enter his brother, determined me to renounce the plans I had previously formed on my own account. It was, in fact, rather late for *me* to commence my apprenticeship in public life; but I have reasons to hope that the country will have in *him* a servant still more efficient and equally devoted. I flatter myself my utmost ambition will be gratified in the person of my son."

His wife made no reply. She was not fond of the word "ambition." She had seen the tranquillity of more than one happy family wrecked by restless cravings after distinction.

"You look as if you were a little disappointed, my dear old woman, at my having determined to do my duty to the country by proxy!" persisted Mr. Mordaunt, misinterpreting her silence.

"No, indeed," she replied. "Parliament would have carried us, I conclude, to town; and nothing tempts me less than a London life. I was only wondering whether Reresby would not be a happier—perhaps a more useful man, by exercising his abilities in some humbler sphere."

"Why, what other sphere of usefulness would you assign to a young man who has ten thousand a-year keeping warm for him?"

"For the many years to come which I hope will be occupied in the operation," said Mrs. Mordaunt, with a smile, "I would have him improve his mind and steady his character by study and observation; and devote his leisure to promoting the happiness of a family of his own. I trust he will marry during our lifetime."

"Not more than I do. But I have a notion that he will make none the worse match for writing M.P. after his name!"—"But surely not the happier?" "Yes, the happier—or I never would have pledged my word to the match." "Pledged your word?" exclaimed his astonished wife.

"Now I have let so much escape me, my dear, perhaps I had better say more. But, having always observed that talking about matrimonial engagements beforehand is sure to put a spoke in the wheel, I made Freshley promise me to keep *his* wife out of the secret; and was, of course, forced to make a counter promise to the same effect."

"Freshley?"—reiterated Mrs. Mordaunt, in a tone of dismay,

the name of her husband's former partner affording a most unsatisfactory clue to the mystery.

"The proposal was one of his own making," replied the husband. "Some years ago, when I first intimated my intention of retiring from the firm as soon as I could dispose of my share, Freshley, who, I really believe, loves me like a brother, afforded proof of his regret at the dissolution of our connexion, by declaring that if, at five-and-twenty, Reresby should be disposed to marry his niece, and Claudia have grown up to our liking, he would give her a hundred thousand pounds dower, and at his death the whole of his fortune and the whole of the business."

"But with Reresby's prospects, it is not money he wants. And Claudia Freshley could *never* grow up to our liking!"

"In yours and Matilda's society she would improve. And Freshley's fortune, including the business, cannot be estimated at less than four hundred thousand pounds."

"A noble prospect, certainly; but surely of less consequence to *us* than other people? With only Reresby and your daughter to think of (for Tom is nobly provided for by the share of the business awaiting him), is it necessary to sacrifice the happiness of our promising son?"

"Sacrifice it?—God forbid!—But in the event of our changing our mind, there is always the saving clause of Claudia's growing up to our liking."

"Surely it is Reresby's liking that ought rather to be consulted?"

"His preferences have hitherto been our own."

"Because they were those of a boy. But now that he has seen more of the world—a world to *us* unknown—he may acquire other tastes—the tastes of the day—the tastes of the young—"

"I hope you don't mean, my dear, that you think him likely to turn out a fashion-hunter?"

"I might reiterate your exclamation, and say, 'God forbid!' But I do *not* think it. On the contrary, I believe him to be actuated in his loves and likings only by the best motives and purest taste."

"Well, well," interrupted Mr. Mordaunt, a little more impatiently than was his wont, "do not go in search of obstacles to a plan which I confess occupies no small share of my thoughts. As a practical man, I know the value of four hundred thousand pounds. The few good deeds which you sometimes make it your pride to lay to my account, I should never have been able to achieve, my dear wife, without the command of ready money, that fostered my good intent. I would fain see my son enjoy the same opportunities."

"I am convinced he would be equally prompt to improve them."

"The more reason, my dear, for not raising objections to poor little Claudia Freshley! All I ask of you, therefore, is to say not

a syllable on the subject to Reresby. We have nearly two years before us. Time enough to apprise him of our project when satisfied that the girl has turned out what we could wish in a daughter-in-law. He is to spend the autumn quietly at Deasmarsh, enlivened by visits to such of his friends as have sporting at his disposal; and before the meeting of parliament, will be returned for Castle Dangan, which I have snug in my pocket. If I know anything of his character, he will soon be engrossed by aims of too important a nature not to rejoice at having the trouble of a long courtship taken off his hands; more especially when he finds a capital establishment and a pretty little wife provided for him, with nothing to do but hang his hat up in the hall."

Fathers seldom *do* know anything of the character of their sons, or they would not so often propose measures likely to drive them into rebellion. Many was the time that Reresby had been punished in earlier life for his boyish mimicry of the vulgarity of old Freshley and his family; worthy, well-intentioned people, of a decidedly inferior order to the Mordaunts, and indebted for their accession of wealth solely to the intelligence of mind of their former partner. But, even had it been otherwise, Reresby was of too independent a turn of mind to have his destinies pre-arranged, even by his father. If volatile in his tastes, in his opinions he was both decided and obstinate; and to his mother all this was so clearly apparent, that, bound by her promise to let the Freshley affair take its course without warning to her son, the pride and joy with which she welcomed him to Deasmarsh,—to the beautiful seat which the industry and judgment of his father had placed on a par with the first in the county,—were somewhat deteriorated by anxiety to penetrate the secrets of his young heart.

It was Spring when he arrived; the period of the year when every day affords to the landscape the same beautiful changes of hue and expression as to the face of a young beauty. Never had Deasmarsh looked more enchanting. The American plants of the home-shrubbery presented their richest masses of bloom; while the fine conservatory adjoining the house afforded to the eye of the fastidious traveller a display of highly-cultivated tropical plants, such as, in their native clime, he had rarely seen attain similar perfection.

"Lucky that my father sent me abroad while he was finishing Deasmarsh!" cried Reresby, having luxuriated for a few days in the beauties and comforts of the place; "for, after seeing it in its present perfect state, it would have been indeed difficult to tear myself away. Under my tent among the Bedouins, or the arcades of the Alcazar, I should have languished after these pleasant shades."

Mrs. Mordaunt was not sorry that the absence of the family from Cromer Hall should remove, just then, the only drawback

upon the pleasantness of their neighbourhood. The Rector and his little daughter frequently enlivened their domestic circle. But even when, the death of the poor girls having called away the former, the kind-hearted Mistress of Deasmarsch insisted on having Emma for an inmate during his absence, she felt no hesitation on her son's account. Her handsome Reresby, who had been taking part in the court festivities of Naples and Madrid, Vienna and Paris, and who, she could perceive by words he occasionally let fall, had not passed unnoticed in those brilliant crowds, was in no great danger from the pretty face of the first unformed country girl that fell in his way—more particularly as the predominant charm of Emma Cromer, her childish buoyancy of spirits, was for the moment in eclipse. Parted for the first time in her life from her father, she was often in tears: the untimely fate of her two playmates and the bereavement of poor Magdalen excited her utmost sympathy. To divert the attention of his mother's guest from these afflicting considerations, Reresby entered more minutely than he had ever purposed into the strange eventful history of his travels.

"I know I am a bore. All travellers are bores when they prose about what they have seen, and apologise for what they have not seen," said he one morning, while lounging beside the work-table of his sister and her little friend. "But you must bear with me, young ladies, now I have fallen into a narrative vein, lest, for want of an audience, I should be beguiled, sooner or later, into the weakness of print. Consider into what inventions I might be betrayed by the lying vocation of authorship, in order to fill out the flanks of my lean and hungry volumes!"

And it was certainly no disagreeable addition to the interest excited by his narratives in the mind of his grave sister, to watch the varying expression they served to call up in the mutable countenance of one whom, as they grew more familiar, the young traveller, who was recounting his hair-breadth scapes, permitted himself to call his "delicate Desdemona." For Emma was not only impressionable as an intelligent child, but comparatively so ignorant as to be enthralled by descriptions familiar to Miss Mordaunt through the pages of modern tourists. The Desert was new to her; or rather a name—a scriptural name, which she seemed almost afraid to take in vain; and, when Reresby proceeded to describe the frightful scenes he had witnessed in the plague-stricken city of Cairo, where his friend and fellow-traveller Sir Herbert Glynn had all but fallen a victim to that terrible scourge, so deathly pale grew the face of his pretty little auditress, and so cold and tremulous was the hand she laid upon Matilda's arm, beseeching her to bespeak the forbearance of her brother, that Reresby was fain to dash into an *olla podrida* of his adventures at Seville; mingling together, in brilliant confusion, bull-fights, sere-

nades, seguedillas, fandangoes, Murillo's pictures, Montes's exploits, coppices of geraniums, and groves of orange-trees and pomegranates!

Poor Emma's often-repeated exclamations of "*how* she should like to have been with him, amidst such stirring scenes and spectacles!" was of course parried by his rejoinder, that "*in that* case he should have lost the pleasure of recounting them to her;" and Miss Mordaunt, dearly as she loved the affectionate girl who clung so confidently to their friendship, could not help sometimes wondering at her brother's patience in taking such pains to entertain one whose simple mind might have been diverted at easier cost.

"She is *so* pretty!" was Reresby's rejoinder, when, one day, his sister rallied him on having given up a fishing-party, at Settringham Abbey, for the pleasure of idling about the grounds at Deasmarsh with Emma and herself. "In these days of artifice and over-education, it is something, let me tell you, to meet with a person so unsophisticated. I don't believe Tommy Moore found anything purer or fairer than Emma, when he went angel-hunting under the shade of the sumachs, among the woodpeckers of the backwoods."

Of Tommy Moore's angel-hunts Miss Mordaunt knew nothing. But she ventured to suggest to her brother that his admiration of this "unsophisticated person" might possibly ripen into a feeling somewhat more dangerous.

"Why *dangerous*, Matty?" said he. "My father, so indulgent to his children, and so warm an advocate of human independence, will certainly allow us to exercise a choice in so grave a matter as marriage?"

Matilda was silent.

"Will you be pleased to open those pretty lips of yours," cried her brother, "which were so voluble, unasked, just now?"

"Better not!" replied Miss Mordaunt; "for we shall certainly not agree."

"I do not want you to agree with me. I want you to tell me on what ground my father could object to an alliance with the Cromers?"

"Is it not equally possible that the Cromers might object to intermarry with our family?"

"Pho, pho, child! You are in your dotage before you come to years of discretion. People of six times their consequence would jump at an alliance with Deasmarsh and ten thousand a-year!"

"People of six times their consequence can afford to overlook deficiencies insuperable to *them*. When George Melfont proposed to me this winter, Lord and Lady Melfont did all that depended upon *them* to forward the views of their son. But I should be sorry that my happiness depended on obtaining the consent of the family at Cromer Hall to my marriage with one of *theirs*."

"Are you in earnest, Matilda?" cried Reresby Mordaunt, who could not persuade himself to look with much deference upon obscure esquiredom. "Do you really mean that, in this century of railroads and patent medicines, your Northamptonshire Squire presumes upon a descent, unillustrated by historical distinction or a single chivalrous association, to fancy himself somebody? Do these Cromers (fatteners of beeves and brewers of strong drink, from generation to generation,) fancy themselves superior to a race, their equals in education, which has placed itself, by its own efforts, almost on a level with the aristocracy?"

"Unquestionably! And, as society is constituted, my dear brother, I fancy such would be the general verdict."

"You believe, in short, that a nobleman, like Lord Melfont, would be better pleased to connect himself with the Cromer family than ours?" "Far better!"

For some minutes, Reresby Mordaunt maintained the silence of which, shortly before, he had accused his sister. He was evidently chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancies.

"During my wanderings in the East," said he, at last, addressing Matilda, but in so low a voice that he seemed to be thinking aloud, "where one cannot help reverting to primitive times, and lamenting the lapse into barbarism of the countries consecrated to our veneration by the rise of Christianity, it often humiliated me to reflect on the little progress the world has made, during the two thousand years which ought to have sufficed to civilize mankind, and on the vast portions of the earth's surface, where laws as vile and practices as savage still prevail as during the mission of the Apostles. But hang me if I ever dreamed, dearest Matty, that, in the heart of a polished country like England, such uncharitable narrowness of mind as you describe was still to be found!"

Miss Mordaunt could scarcely refrain from smiling at the semi-serious earnestness of his apostrophe.

"Admit, however, that it is as well you should be forewarned, before the return of the family to Cromer Hall," said she, "that, though the good Rector, as becomes the religion he teaches, goes hand-in-hand with my father, and perfectly understands his value and importance in the country, to the head of the family, Mordaunt of Deasmarsh is still only Mordaunt the cotton-spinner!"

"Hush, hush!" cried Reresby, pointing to Emma and her father, who, having just entered Mrs. Mordaunt's sitting-room, were engaged in friendly greetings; "for *their* sakes, do not force me to tax, as it deserves, such confoundedly vulgar impertinence! Even little Emma would never speak to me again, were I to give her my real opinion of the Lilliputian consequence of Cromer of Cromer Hall!"

CHAPTER VI.

If the equipage of those who ascend into honour and figure, from the successful trade of their ancestors, could bear note of the fact, it would quicken industry in the pursuit of such acquisitions, and discountenance luxury in the enjoyment of them.—SIR RICHARD STEELE.

THERE appeared some risk that Matilda's warning might have the effect usual in such cases, of imparting undue interest to the prohibited object; for, in the course of the following fortnight, the increasing familiarity of the traveller with Emma, the hearty laughs they enjoyed together, and the number of times that, when Reresby was missing at Deasmarsh, he was found to have spent the morning at the Rectory, served to increase the uneasiness of his sister. May, however, had scarcely sprinkled the hawthorn hedges of Deaswold with its snowy blossoms, when the unexpected arrival in England of Sir Herbert Glynne, the college friend with whom he had visited the East and parted at Damascus, overthrew, in a moment, his rural plans; and off he went, to pass the remainder of the season in town, without further thought of Deaswold Rectory or his "delicate Desdemona."

"Safe for the present!"—was the secret ejaculation of his sister, whose satisfaction at Sir Herbert's return was not a little enhanced by the new direction it afforded to the thoughts of her brother. For she entertained little fear but that, in the vortex of London life, amid the interests of the puny war of politics and the gay sparkling of the coteries, he would soon forget the pretty face which had derived its charm from the absence of higher attraction. Nor were her anticipations at fault. In Sir Herbert Glynne's society he soon attained other ambitions. At Reresby's age impressions are readily taken. After a week's sojourn in town, he recollected Northamptonshire only as the county containing his happy home, and the rich acres basking in the sunshine which he should some day call his own. His views had expanded, the focus of his destiny attained a wider circumference. A patient listener in the gallery of the House of Commons, his pulse began to throb in unison with those of the nation. He came to care for the "ins" and "outs;" or, rather, for the probability that the "outs" would become "ins," *not* from a desire that such or such a friend might be provided for, but from the grave conviction that the change would operate forcibly on the prosperity of the country. And if, amid the hurry of dinner-parties and crush of operas and balls, the Rector's daughter ever occurred to his mind, it was merely as a prattling, inoffensive, little creature, who was the best listener in the world.

The summer was over when he returned to Deasmarsh; and.

surrounded by its stubble-fields, it struck him, perhaps, as somewhat less of a terrestrial paradise than it had appeared, when viewed in immediate contrast with the barn-like country-houses and wide fallows of the continent. The home enjoyment to which he had looked forward with the greatest eagerness was his father's society. He wanted to talk over with the soundest head and warmest heart of his acquaintance, the new interests he had heard discussed, the new policy had seen expounded.

"I can't understand, my dear father," said he, the first time they were alone together, "how, with your powers of mind and stake in the country, you have had courage to keep out of the House of Commons!"

"Easily explained, my dear boy!" was the manufacturer's frank reply. "Till within these few years, my time belonged to my business; and, on retiring from it, I fell too desperately in love with leisure to part readily from my new charmer. Nor, as Parliament has not room for a fifth part of those as able and willing as myself to execute the business of the country, is there any necessity for self-sacrifice."

After such a preamble, it was indeed gratifying to expound to Reresby the arrangements made in his favour.

"*You*, however, my dear son," continued he, "have not yet earned your right to lounge about under the shadow of your oaks. And in *your* case, Reresby, one of my personal objections to a parliamentary career is obviated. My fortune would not have supported Deasmarsh, such as it has been my pride to make it, and a suitable establishment in town. Whereas, *you* will live in chambers, in lodgings, or at an hotel; and, with the fifteen hundred a-year I shall allow you, may fully support, as a bachelor, the honours of your condition in life."

It was not the honours of his condition in life, however, that dazzled the eyes of Reresby. A noble career was suddenly opened before him. He was prepared to fulfil to the utmost the projects of his father; and, for the sake of their common credit, devote to the study of the laws of the country those idle autumnal months predestined to the rod and gun, or, rather, to pheasants and the fox.

"Poor Emma!" sighed Matilda Mordaunt, when, by the earnestness with which her brother was setting to work, she perceived how much she had in the first instance miscalculated his danger. "I fear she will fret sadly, poor child, at finding herself thus completely forgotten!"

Great, however, was her relief when a week or two after Reresby's arrival in the country, Emma, with her usual girlish frankness, apologised for coming so rarely to Deasmarsh.

"You must tell your brother," said she, "that it is not because I am less interested than formerly in his amusing stories. But I

give up all my time now to Magdalen. I cannot bear my poor cousin to be a moment alone; and at present, alas! I fear there is little chance of overcoming the prejudices of my uncle and aunt, so as to effect an acquaintance between the two families."

From any other human being, Miss Mordaunt would have attributed this strange excuse to pique, engendered by the slights from which she was suffering. But nothing but truth ever issued from the lips of Emma.

It might be, indeed, that Miss Mordaunt was content to take things on their own showing, from being a little flurried by the approaching arrival of Reresby's Eastern fellow-traveller; who, when their guest in Lancashire, some years before, had left an impression on her feelings which at one time she believed, or fancied, or hoped, to be reciprocal; and which the issue of their present meeting would bring to the test. Her uncertainty concerning the sentiments of Sir Herbert Glynne was, in fact, the origin of the reserve of manner, at first so repellent to Emma Cromer. A suspicion that he was deterred from giving way to his preference by disinclination to unite his destinies with those of a manufacturer's daughter, had chilled the warm expansion of her heart, until she became shy, and apparently cold and ungracious. It had occurred to her, indeed, that the haste with which Sir Herbert started on his travels was instigated by the desire of putting to the proof of absence an attachment thoughtlessly indulged during his college vacations; and, from the time of his quitting England (an interval devoted by the Mordaunt family to their establishment in their new residence), Matilda had all but made up her mind that, on his return to England, he would prudently allow the acquaintance to drop. Very difficult had it been, in fact, even to her self-governed nature, to abstain from such seemingly careless inquiries of her brother as might set this point at rest. She sometimes resolved, while conversing with Reresby during his first visit to Deasmarsh, that the day should not expire without explicitly determining whether she were forgotten by Sir Herbert, or whether they were likely to see him on the same familiar footing as of old. But when on the point of giving utterance to her anxieties, the words clave to her lips. It would be so terrible to learn that there was to be an end, an utter end, to her day-dream! Even her present spirit-breaking suspense was better than the certainty that the object of her choice was lost to her for ever and ever.

One day, however, soon after Reresby's return from town, as Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt were planning a dinner party, to include the Melfonts and Settringhams, her brother petitioned that it might not take place till after the 10th of August, "because, *then*, Glynne would be with them;" an announcement which forced his sister to quit the room, lest it should become as clear to others as to herself, that the intelligence thus unconcernedly imparted was to *her*

a matter of life and death. He was coming then ; and the girl, unable at sixteen to determine whether his attentions arose from the unmeaning gallantry of a flighty, fashionable young man, fancied she had attained, with her one and-twentieth year, sufficient tact and discernment to ascertain the extent of his regard. Though the interim had been spent by Matilda in domestic seclusion,

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,

and that clash of interests and cunning which imparts the vulgar science called knowledge of the world, she fancied that the book-learning to which she had been devoting her leisure, and the *Selbständigkeit* acquired by solitary self-communing, would place her on a par with one who had been conning the great book of mankind in varied climes and countries.

There was one point, however, on which Matilda felt conscious of being weak as the weakest of her sex. The satisfaction with which she learned that the Melfonts were to visit Deasmarsch during his stay,—the Melfonts who, in spite of a genealogy that reached to the crusades, had eagerly courted her for their son,—proved how real was her conviction that a sense of the inequality of their condition had kept the roving baronet aloof. She was ashamed of herself for wishing that he should see that a coronet was an insufficient temptation to the cotton-spinner's daughter ; yet, in spite of her better reason, so it was.

But on the day of Sir Herbert's arrival at Deasmarsch, the only addition to the family party consisted of the Rector and his daughter ; and Matilda's dread lest her flutter of spirits while receiving the homage of their guest should become apparent to a mere child, like Emma, served sadly to increase the emotions she was unable to subdue. Scarcely, however, were they seated at the abundant and well-served dinner-table, when Miss Mordaunt perceived that the attention of both Sir Herbert and her little friend, so far from being directed to herself, was exclusively absorbed by each other. The traveller was in the highest spirits ;—perhaps forced,—perhaps arising from the excitement of being again among friends from whom he had been so long parted ;—for, under such circumstances, the embarrassment of not exactly knowing whether the privileges of former intimacy will be accorded or withheld, is apt to take refuge in assumed vivacity.

"But surely the same thing, or something very much like it, occurred to Mr. Reresby Mordaunt?" observed Emma, at the close of an excellent anecdote concerning Mehemet Ali, which Sir Herbert had been relating.

"To Reresby?—He never was within miles of the spot!" replied Sir Herbert, with pretended indignation. "If Reresby has been pretending to strut in my borrowed plumes, I denounce him as an impostor. I see how it is!" continued he: "the popularity he

boasted to me of having acquired in Northamptonshire is, after all, the result of basely pilfering my commonplace-book, and establishing a reputation for heroism on the strength of my romantic exploits. Reresby!" cried he (as soon as his friend came to the close of the argument he was holding with the Rector—running down the bagged fox of the narrow gauge), "I have a great mind, sir, to sue you for damages!—I hear you have been pillaging my Oriental treasures; and can well imagine the wanton waste of good things that has ensued from your misappropriation."

"On the contrary, my dear fellow, you ought to thank me," retorted his friend, "for bringing into use the costly materials you know not how to turn to account."

"It is easy to charge people with incompetency!" rejoined Sir Herbert, with such well-dissembled displeasure, that the simple-hearted Emma began to get a little nervous; "but who gave you permission, pray, to snip up my rich brocade into patchwork? I vow to Heaven I suffer as much from seeing the Doric simplicity of a good story destroyed by a bungler, who makes neither head nor tail of it, as a *chef d'œuvre* of the old masters retouched and varnished by the hands of a picture-cleaner!"

"You are an ungrateful fellow, Glynne," said his young friend in the same bantering tone. "Considering the sacrifice I made you of half my traveller's relics,—bricks from the tower of Babel, and a slip of palm from the tomb of Eve,—for the behoof of that insatiable rarity-monger, Lady Madrepore (to whom or to whose conversazioni you were making such desperate love a few weeks ago), you need not grudge me a few flimsy adventures, which you have worn threadbare, and which no second-hand, second-rate tour-shop in Paternoster Row would buy off your hands."

It was now Matilda's turn to redden; though, had she taken courage to watch the countenance of Sir Herbert, she could have discerned that the allusion to Lady Madrepore brought no guilty flush to his sallow cheek.

"Reresby is a shabby fellow," he contented himself with retorting, "to interfere with my coterie reputation. The only laurels that can ever fall to *my* lot, must be cultivated in the *jardinière* of a drawing-room. Whereas, *he* has Parliament before him, with as many garlands in embryo as would serve for a Roman ovation or one of Lumley's ballets! I can assure you, Miss Cromer, that, while discussing the triangular morsel of the London season to which he was pleased to help himself, the vaulting ambitions of the future senator were evident in every look and word. No balls, no concerts, no flirtations, no fun of any kind! Reresby was as constant to the House, as if already the legitimate prey of the whipper-in."

That he addressed these remarks to Emma instead of herself, with whom it would have been more natural that he should have

talked than with a perfect stranger, was jealously attributed by Miss Mordaunt to the air of intense interest with which her young friend sat listening to his sallies, and to the charm imparted to her young face by its fluctuating bloom. For how was she to surmise that the attentions paid to Emma throughout the evening by Sir Herbert were the result of Reresby's hint to him in London, as an excuse for the avoidance of parties, that there was a little field-flower blooming in his Northamptonshire meadows more lovely than the crown imperials and tiger lilies of the fashionable world; or that the discriminating friend was naturally desirous to satisfy himself concerning the merits of one to whose hands he thought it far from impossible the happiness of Reresby might at some future moment be confided. Still less was she likely to conjecture that the undisguised interest with which Emma contemplated Sir Herbert Glynne arose from anxiety to ascertain whether *all* young men returning from an Oriental tour were equally fascinating: or whether the feelings of admiration excited in her mind by Reresby Mordaunt, not as she now saw him, but as he was on his first arrival at Deasmarsh, were created by her own inexperience rather than by the measure of his deserts.

CHAPTER VII.

I am joined with no foot land-rakers,—no long-staff sixpenny strikers, nor any of the mal mustachio purple-hued maltworms. But with nobility and tranquillity; burgomasters and great oneyers.—SHAKESPEARE.

Like Pentheus, when distracted by his fear,
He saw two suns and double Thebes appear.—DRYDEN.

If the cracks and flaws of human nature be ever entitled to indulgence, Miss Mordaunt might surely be pardoned her momentary regret at the too implicit obedience of Lord Melfont's son and heir to her request that he would forget having ever asked her hand in marriage, in order that the intimacy of the families, as country neighbours, might suffer no interruption. For, though Sir Herbert Glynne had soon occasion to witness the friendly deference testified by the whole Melfont family towards her, the coldness of George Melfont's deportment, when constrained by order of precedence to take his place by her side, was little indicative of passionate attachment. Seated between him and the prosy pedantic Mr. Settringham, Matilda was seen to the greatest disadvantage; and the appearance of shy reserve which had formerly so alarmed the susceptibility of poor Emma, entitled Sir Herbert, who was stationed opposite and frequently met her eye, to infer that he was himself the object of her displeasure. There was consequently every reason for him to regret the absence of his more gracious auditress of the preceding day. When, to evade the encounter of

Miss Mordaunt's freezing looks, he endeavoured to enter into conversation with Lady Melfont and Lady Settringham, between whom he was placed, he saw clearly that he was set down as a Munchausen by the two country ladies, for merely venturing to allude to his recent visit to Jericho beyond Jordan, and having brought down his lion among the highlands of Ethiopia. And a poor alternative was it to listen in his turn to the discussion between their husbands and Reresby, concerning a notice of action for trespass served by the lord of the manor that morning on Mr. Mordaunt; in which the latter had both law, equity, and usance on his side.

Miss Mordaunt, who noticed the air of abstraction into which Sir Herbert had fallen at the close of the argument, would have given worlds to silence the puerile circumstantiality with which Sir William Settringham kept enlarging on the numerous previous offences against his host committed by their neighbour at Cromer Hall. While her father, too high minded to be in the smallest degree affected by the Squire's assumption of superiority, listened with more amusement than chagrin to a summing-up of the insults to which he had been exposed, Matilda, shrinking with the thin-skinned sensibility of youth from anything like disparagement or contumely, could not bear to find her family placed before the eyes of the man she loved in a light so ignominious. For the first time that she could remember, it was a relief when Lady Melfont, in compliment to the young baronet who wore the "complement extern" of a man of wit and pleasure about town, began to talk of London.

How little analogy there existed between men of wit and pleasure about town, had Sir Herbert possessed any pretension to the character, and a family of Lord Melfont's class, which enjoyed its country serenity with as harmless a beatitude in its old-fashioned house in Queen Anne Street as in the midst of its Northamptonshire park, was not apparent to Matilda. Of the wide gulf existing between their inoffensive respectability and the flash fashionability of May Fair, she knew nothing. Conceiving the Melfonts to occupy in London the same pre-eminent position they commanded in a straggling country neighbourhood, she could scarcely account to herself for an outrage of candour so unworthy the honest-hearted Lady Melfont, as her observation—"We live so out of the world, that I know little of what goes on. But I am assured that last season was considered an unusually brilliant one."

"Shall I never steer clear of that hateful word 'season!'" thought Sir Herbert, who had flattered himself that, in the homely household of Mordaunt the cotton-spinner, he was secure against all shallow pretence to fashion. But the age and grave aspect of Lady Melfont demanded more courtesy in reply.

"I am a bad person to refer to about London or its pleasures,"

said he. "Having been three years absent from England, I have completely broken, thank Heaven, those golden chains of bondage which render man in St. James's Street as complete a slave as man under the thralldom of the Bey of Tunis. As such ties do not, like a fractured bone, naturally reknit themselves, I take particular care to preserve my freedom by remaining a boor."

Without exactly understanding him, Lady Melfont ventured to remark that "a London life was indeed sad slavery; and that, as soon as the Birthday and the Ancient Concerts were over, she and Lord Melfont were quite glad to leave town. Her son being neither in Parliament nor a dancing man"—(the alternative raised a smile on the lips of Sir Herbert)—"they were under no necessity to labour through the last stage of the season."

"Unless the human race can be strengthened and magnified by the progress of modern science," observed Sir Herbert, (perhaps by way of pretext for his smile,) "and prize men and women grown like prize geraniums,—I beg their pardon—pelargoniums,—I know not how our grandsons are to resist the increasing stress upon the human energies! Within the last half century, the West-end of London is nearly doubled in extent. Yet people are expected to get through the same number of engagements per day, extending from Portland Place to Hyde Park Gardens, and Belgrave Square, as when the two latter were rural retreats in the neighbourhood of the metropolis, where gentlemen went to shoot each other in duels, or dowagers assassinated each other in rival breakfasts."

"Quite true!" interposed Lord Melfont, who had figured in his youth at the *déjeuners costumés* of Albinia Countess of Buckinghamshire at her *rus in urbe*, among the gravelpits of Pimlico.

"When one reflects," gravely resumed Sir Herbert, encouraged by having obtained the ear of the house, "on the agglomeration of works the present century has added to the amount of book-learning the last generation had to undergo, it seems impossible that the same amount of faculties, which could hardly digest the earlier produce, should prove equal to the task. New arts and sciences annually spring up, a smattering at least of which is indispensable to all thinking people; and unless one were to purchase a patent caoutchouc memory, it will soon become impossible to remember even the new names supplied by modern discovery. Physically or morally, we do not follow the roads laid down for the use of our fathers."

"At least you will admit," interposed Mr. Settringham, from the further end of the table, (Lady Melfont, unaccustomed to be so longwindedly addressed among her country-neighbours, sitting silent and aghast,) "at least you will admit, my dear Sir, that if new labours and occasions for acquirement have been added to our earthly mission, much of the business of life has been abridged of

its tediousness? I, for instance, am able to perform in a few hours the journey from Settringham Abbey to town, which it took my father a couple of days to accomplish."

"And the consequence is," added Sir Herbert, "that you perform it so much more frequently in the course of the year, that you may set down quite as many days to travelling out of every three hundred and sixty-five, as were sacrificed to the same end by your forefathers.—*Experientia docet*. Born before the discovery of steam, I should unquestionably have satisfied my roving propensities by plodding in the steps of the great Johnson to the Hebrides, or, at the utmost, tripped in those of Oliver Goldsmith on the banks of the 'lazy Scheld or wandering Po:' a tour to the lakes, or the grand tour sufficing to wear down my energies to the level of my domestic fireside. But, as a citizen of the times when monthly Railway Guides announce the periodical sailing of steam-packets for New York and Hong Kong, the Red Sea and the Black, the North Pole and the South, I could not of course content myself without eating my pillau at Ispahan and my canvas-back duck on the Schuylkill, before I settled down for life to my English turkey at Christmas. I have consequently devoted the same number of years to my wanderings; and travelled some thousands of leagues more than by birthright entitled."

"I fancy, Sir Herbert, you accompanied my friend Reresby as far as Damascus?" observed Mr. Settringham, who, as the best talker in the neighbourhood, was a little afraid of being overprosod.

"Our friend Reresby accompanied *me* as far as Damascus! But *I* went further and fared considerably worse. If the overland mail had not charitably picked me up and brought me back to Egypt, I should have been probably chopped into messes by this time at Bokhara, and have had Joseph Wolf pilgrimizing across the desert to ascertain whereabouts my remains were eaten by the jackals."

"I cannot but congratulate you, however, my dear sir, on the valuable opportunities you have enjoyed of turning to account the resources of a classical education!" rejoined Settringham, evidently preparing to display his own erudition in the questions he was about to inflict upon his rival.

But Sir Herbert had too little taste for such exhibitions (a serious nuisance in a quiet country party) to indulge his pretensions.

"To own the truth, and speaking it to my shame," said he, "I travelled chiefly to forget what I had learned. How are we ever to become classical authorities to our successors, if we contemplate men and things only through the eyes of antiquity? I am content to see the cities and countries I visit, as they present themselves; to study their laws as they exist, their buildings as they stand, and their customs as they jar against my own, without

caring what was done in the same spot in the days of Xerxes; and, when weary of examining what presents itself, would rather speculate concerning the future destinies of the nation with which I am in contact, than lose my way, misled by conflicting guides, among the dreary mazes of the olden time."

"You are at least a lucky man to have had the alternative at command!" rejoined Mr. Settringham, a little nettled. "But we country bumpkins, whose fate it is to stay at home and hoe our turnips, are fain to content ourselves with intelligence derived from books."

"But don't you see, my dear Settringham," interposed Reresby Mordaunt, "that it is the inordinate vanity of my friend Glynne which makes him disdain the use of pilots and choose his own channel?"

"At the risk of shipwreck!" retorted Sir Herbert. "But, at all events, my foolhardiness endangers no other man. I have no intention of publishing the chart of my discoveries. The selfish purpose of my travels is accomplished. All I ever intended was to drive from my mind certain disagreeable thoughts to which England had given rise; and avoid the *corvée* of fashionable life to which the rising youth of Britain is liable, between twenty and twenty-five."

"I have usually heard *that* period considered the pleasantest part of a man's life!" observed the matter-of-fact Lady Melfont, with a conciliatory simper; "before he becomes involved in the duties and responsibilities that mingle cares with his pleasures."

"And preserve his destiny from the insipid glare of a Chinese landscape—all sunshine and no shade!"—retorted Sir Herbert, in a lower voice;—for he submitted in politeness to have his opinions ironed flat by his female neighbour, though there was no occasion to have them previously starched by the pedant. "But I confess I regard what your ladyship calls the duties and responsibilities of life,—such, for instance, as parliamentary committees, or dabbling in stocks or railroads,—as far less laborious than the work I see gratuitously undertaken by certain of my young friends; who, after rising at one and breakfasting on cigars, have to undergo a *déjeuner*, or *matinée musicale* previous to their ride in the park; then, after scampering home to dress for an eight o'clock dinner-party, despatch a concert or the opera, previous to commencing a round of balls; ending the night nearly as they began the day, with cigars and brandy and water, and the morning sun shining full upon their orgies!"

"But I assure you *all* young men in London do not lead so unprofitable a life!"—pleaded Lady Melfont, fearing that, as Miss Mordaunt's attention was occasionally attracted towards them, she might suspect the timid sickly George of a share in these frightful

excesses. "My son never smokes. My son dines quietly with his family at six o'clock."

"All are not blessed with a family so reasonable to fall back upon!" replied Sir Herbert. "When, to secure the first burst of the overture on opera nights, I dine at six, the waiters at my club look heartily ashamed of me; and bring me the 'Morning Herald,' instead of an evening paper, as a snob who ought to be satisfied with second best."

"My son is always one of the first in the stalls!" observed her ladyship, again glancing with partial eyes at the blushing George.

"Mr. Melfont is fortunate in belonging to those whose habits favour his tastes," replied Sir Herbert, politely. "But, generally speaking, I find my London friends, both old and young, instead of indulging the tendencies of their inclination, occupied solely in striving, bustling, and elbowing each other, in order to obtain front seats in the gaudy theatre of fashion. People may talk of the wars of the Two Roses; but I doubt whether they occasioned half the care or outlay produced by the grand struggle of modern times, between the rival battalions of the rich and great."

"Not *rival* battalions, surely?" argued Lady Melfont. "So many of the great *are* rich!"

"The most considerable territorial fortunes, perhaps, lie with the aristocracy," replied Sir Herbert, more gravely; "but, with few exceptions, the least available. Were an annual mortgage-list published, like those of the army and navy, setting forth the liabilities of our nobility, the moneyed magnates of England would add a cubit to their stature and to the depression of their neighbours. Look at the amount of landed property which, within the last fifty years, has changed hands; and you will find that the plebeian interest has doubled its stake in the country!"

Not precisely comprehending his drift, and afraid that the mere utterance of the word "plebeian" in his dining-room might hurt the feelings of Mr. Mordaunt, Lady Melfont was not a little rejoiced that the fine fruit at that moment placed on the table afforded her a safe topic for eulogium.

"I must admit," said Sir Herbert, "that I never tasted, in tropical climates, by spontaneous growth, fruit half so delicious as that for which England is indebted to the resources of art."

"Because," observed Reresby, "those who incur the cost of cultivation are naturally careful to select the finer kinds. But do not expect *me* to forswear myself, by maintaining that England affords anything to compare with the purple figs and transparent apricots of the Levant!"

"*Mi basta il palazzo Pitti!*—I am content with those of Deasmarsh," replied Sir Herbert. "A tawny-cheeked Moor Park for me!"

"The Deasmarsh forcing-houses, however, will scarcely come

into full play for a couple of years," added Mr. Mordaunt, the conversation having become general. "At our house in Lancashire, which adjoined my factory, the stoves and succession-houses had the benefit of our surplus steam, and we had warm baths in the house gratuitously heated in the same manner. There, I had found time to bring the whole system to perfection; whereas, at Deasmarsh, the fruit is twice as costly, and half as fine."

Matilda was ashamed of the blush that rose upon her cheek at this allusion to the old times she was so anxious Sir Herbert Glyne should forget. But her anxiety was speedily relieved by his enthusiastic ejaculations.

"Thank you, my dear sir," said he, "for having relieved my scruples! I was afraid of offering an affront to your Northamptonshire grapes by admitting that, even in Syria, I never tasted any half so fine as at Burtmill; nor did I ever see in the East such exquisite roses as those you had in cultivation at the old place."

"Why, yes! I believe we succeeded pretty well in our gardening," replied Mr. Mordaunt, in a gratified tone; "and my partner, who is a richer man than I am, from being childless, has done a great deal more to the place since I quitted it. The fact is," added he, proudly, "that, with the exception of Middlesex, there is not a shire in England where so much money is applied to the enjoyments of life as in our manufacturing county of Lancashire; more, in fact, than is altogether safe, or perhaps altogether right. One of my many motives for removal was the uneasy doubt perpetually struggling in my mind, whether I were justified in exposing the luxury of my existence to the envy of those miserable neighbours by whom it was created."

"I don't know what you call miserable, my dear sir," exclaimed Sir Herbert. "All I know is, that I never beheld a more prosperous or contented race than your workmen at Burtmill!"

"I trust so! I trust in God they were thriving and contented," rejoined Mr. Mordaunt; "for to them am I indebted for all my prosperity. But it was not so throughout the district; nor could I ride five miles ahead, without running against a population whose wretchedness deprived me of all appetite for nectarines and peaches. Unable to relieve, I was glad to escape the sight of this human degradation; but, thanks to the wisdom of the reformed parliament, I shall go to my grave the easier for having seen the evil sensibly diminish. It is one of the noblest tasks of those who legislate for the next generation, that they will have to adjust more nicely the balance of human comfort between rich and poor."

Matilda was not sorry that the time was come for the ladies to rise from the table and repair to the drawing-room. For, though proud of the candour with which her father reverted to his condition of life, she was glad to be spared the arguments certain to arise from his last observation; Sir William Settringham and

Lord Melfont being staunch protectionists, and accustomed to fight their battles with an acrimonious intolerance of ultra-toryism which it required more than the wise moderation of Mr. Mordaunt to parry. On their entrance half an hour afterwards into the conservatory, where the lady-guests were taking coffee, there seemed, however, little justification of Matilda's apprehensions that they had been engaged in the endless county-gentleman warfare of pauperism and poor-laws; for the first question addressed to her by Sir Herbert Glynn, who came straight towards her, leading her brother by the sleeve, regarded the name of a very beautiful girl, whom they had encountered while hurrying home across the fields from shooting, to dress for dinner.

"Reresby insists upon it that she is a Miss Cromer," said Sir Herbert. "But between the little cherry-lipped fairy, with her silken ringlets and infantine graces, to whom I lost my heart yesterday, and the regular features and raven braids of the pale-faced nun fawned upon this morning by our pointers, like Una by the lions, I cannot perceive the least analogy."

"Was it Miss Cromer whom you met?" inquired Matilda of her brother.

"I conclude so; a very lovely girl, with dark hair, attired in the deepest mourning, just as you have described her to me."

"A cousin, then, and not a sister, of our pretty friend Emma," said she, addressing Sir Herbert, as if in explanation. "I agree with *you* that hers is one of the finest faces I ever saw."

"And you are really boy enough to have thrown away your heart upon the pretty little bachelor's-button at the rectory, Reresby, when this rose unique was blooming in your neighbourhood?" cried Sir Herbert with real or affected indignation.

"Who told you I had thrown away my heart?"

"Yourself, when we met in London. When I asked you what had induced so great a crowd-seeker as yourself to maunder away so large a portion of the season in the country, instead of citing the merits of Deasmarsh and all that it contains as sufficient apology, you spoke of a pretty prattling little neighbour, who had been shedding honey-dew over your spring!"

"A little less oriental, if you please! I told you that, though our principal neighbours had left the country, Deaswold Rectory afforded a charming supplement to the family circle, in the shape of a very sensible man and very pretty girl—"

"From whom you found it a hard matter to tear yourself away!"

"From whom, perhaps, I may have found it a hard matter to tear myself away; but, having accomplished the difficulty, whom I should have found it an equally hard matter to remember in London, had it been desirable, which it was *not*."

"You are, in short, at perfect liberty to fall in love with the

beautiful creature at whose feet Don and Donna threw themselves this morning?"

"The one dilemma is scarcely the necessary consequence of the other," rejoined Reresby, more reserved than his friend, whose Irish blood sometimes overmastered his discretion.

"The dark beauty, perhaps, is not so dear a friend of yours as the chesnut?" said Sir Herbert, addressing Matilda.

Miss Mordaunt shook her head.

"Useless, then, I fear, to apply to you for an introduction to her?" returned he. "And yet, she seemed so much at home in the glebe meadows, that I fancied she must be a resident in Deaswold."

"She is so, but I have only seen her at church. Miss Cromer is the only daughter of the gentleman you heard spoken of at dinner as having brought an action against my father, and treated him, on various occasions, with the greatest animosity."

"Then I wash my hands of the beauty!" cried Sir Herbert, "for she belongs to a bad lot. Whoever could find it in his heart to show animosity to Mr. Mordaunt, must cherish other things there, rendering him indifferent company for Christians. Let the lovely Miss Cromer content herself with the allegiance of the pointers! I beg to have nothing further to say to her!"

"How easily you are prejudiced, and how unjustly!" exclaimed Miss Mordaunt, with frank earnestness. "Magdalen Cromer is one of the most amiable and excellent persons in the world. From her uncle and cousin, as well as among the poor of Deaswold, I have heard innumerable traits of her goodness."

Matilda did not pause to observe that it was her brother rather than his friend who lent an attentive ear to these encomiums.

"And just now," she continued, still addressing herself to Sir Herbert, "she is peculiarly an object of interest, from having recently lost her two only sisters by a rapid decline."

"*She* does not look consumptive," observed Reresby, thinking aloud. "Though pale, there was something in her gait as firm as it was graceful."

"Were it not for the devotedness of my little friend Emma," continued Miss Mordaunt, "the poor girl would be left entirely to the society of her crabbed and uninteresting father and mother; people so little liked in the neighbourhood that nobody who can help it ever goes near them. And think what a resource her company would have been to *me*, but for the ill feeling of Mr. Cromer!"

"I am more inclined to think of what your society would have been to *her*!" rejoined Sir Herbert, with spirit. "The loss be on her father's head, who deserves retribution scarcely less bitter, for having attempted to harass Mr. Mordaunt!"

But Reresby made *no* rejoinder. As if he had heard enough, or perhaps too much, of the Cromers, he was slowly sauntering

along the conservatory towards the house, gazing upwards with vacant eyes at the scarlet streamers of the passiflora. Had a pitfall opened at his feet, the young heir of Deasmarsh would unquestionably have fallen a victim to his abstraction of mind!

CHAPTER VIII.

Good nature has an endless source of pleasures in it; and the representation of domestic life, filled with its natural gratifications (instead of the vexations insisted upon in the writings of the witty), is a good office to society.—SIR RICHARD STEELE.

THOUGH the Rectory of Deaswold put forth no greater claims to tastefulness or comfort than the family mansion which stared it out of countenance from the opposite hill, there was a simplicity in its details that bespoke indulgence. If the forecourt, surrounded by evergreens, were dull and formal, the massive beauty of the old bay-trees and noble size of the weeping ash, whose branches almost covered the grass-plot gracing the centre, afforded some compensation. The sitting-room, which opened from a somewhat dingy wainscoted hall opposite the eating parlour, though called the library in compliment to the small portion of it occupied by the worthy Rector's old-fashioned folios of divinity (which looked as if they knew what they were about far better than the controversial octavos of modern Oxford, standing spruce and gold-lettered by their side), abounded in tokens of being shared with his little daughter. But for the branches of jessamine and musk-rose by which the southern front was covered, that straggled across the window, it would have worn a dreary aspect, however, to be the abiding-place of one so light-hearted as Emma. But the flowers that peeped in, as if in search of a being so kindred with themselves, matched well with her workbox and a few gaily-bound volumes of choice poetry, gift-books to the child of the house. Yes, "*child!*"—though advancing to the age of womanhood. The dutiful feelings rendering it almost as much a matter of religion to the daughter as to the Rector himself, to abstain from the slightest change in the room, which had been disposed in its present state by her late mother—her mother, whom, by the utmost effort of memory, she could not manage to recollect,—were faithful with the faith of childhood. To have filled the room with furniture as rich and beautiful as that of Deasmarsh, Emma would not have relinquished the old-fashioned walnut-wood bureau, in which her mother was known to have kept her letters and account-books. The only difference was, that it was now surmounted by a glass case containing all that remained of her earliest pet—a favourite guinea-hen, given her by "mamma;" on the death of which, of old age, her father had acceded to her wish of having it stuffed; and, thanks to the genius of a Northampton naturalist, the homely

domestic fowl had been made to assume the appearance of a nondescript ornithological specimen, that would have sadly puzzled Audubon or Yarrell. The old-fashioned window-seats commanded a small garden, the turf of which was smooth as velvet, the flower-beds by which it was terminated being divided only by a ha-ha from the well-wooded paddocks of an extensive glebe; a pleasanter view, apparently, in the estimation of both Emma and her cousin Magdalen, than the interminable landscape stared over by the Hall; for there they sat conversing, morning after morning, hour after hour—their needlework sometimes in their hands, but oftener in their lap; their young heads enframed by the pendant bunches of pale musk-roses, imparting fragrance to the room, till the even-song of the thrushes and blackbirds, abounding in the Rectory garden, reminded the elder and graver girl that it was time to claim her uncle's arm for returning home.

On the morrow of her encounter with the young sportsmen, her customary chat with her cousin was interrupted by the numerous questions to which Emma, on hearing of the meeting, chose to have explicit answers.

"She had seen Reresby Mordaunt then?—What did she think of him?—Was he as handsome as she expected?—Was he not twice as good-looking as his friend Sir Herbert?"

And when it appeared that Magdalen had taken too little note of either to be able to distinguish between them, for the first time in her life, Emma a little mistrusted her taste and discernment.

"Reresby Mordaunt was half a head taller than his friend. Reresby's figure and gait were infinitely superior!"

"I saw more of the gait of their dogs than of their own," replied Magdalen, with a smile. "It was as much as I could do to ward off the attentions of a great black setter, who seemed determined to ascertain the contents of the packet of tea and sugar I was carrying to the lodge-keeper's wife."

"Still you must have seen that—"

"I assure you, dear Emma, I saw nothing but the outlines of two figures in shooting-jackets, who called off their dogs when they grew so troublesome."

"My interest concerning Sir Herbert Glynne," observed the Rector's daughter, blushing from the fear that Magdalen's indifference purported to convey a reproach to her warmth, "arises from a suspicion that he and Matilda Mordaunt have been, or are likely to be, engaged. I never saw her so unlike herself as when I dined there, two days ago. She seemed scarcely to know what she was saying or doing; and by the care with which she avoided meeting the eyes of Sir Herbert, or answering his observations when not expressly addressed to her, I feel assured that he is the object of her preference."

"Are such then, my dear Emma, the symptoms of affection?"

inquired Magdalen, a little amused by the tone of experience in which her little cousin laid down the law. But the prompt reply of Emma disarmed her.

"Such is Mr. Melfont's deportment towards Matilda herself; and *his* attachment is no secret in the neighbourhood. He has proposed to her, you know, again and again."

"And is there anything in Sir Herbert Glynne, besides the good looks you speak of, to justify her partiality?"

"*That* I can hardly tell you. I observed him as closely as I could, listened to every word he uttered, and watched every movement; for, loving Matilda as I do, I should be miserable if she made an unhappy choice."

"And do you feel in danger of being miserable?" persisted Magdalen, still smiling at her earnestness.

Emma hesitated for a moment. "No!" said she, at last. "He seems right-thinking, and lively, and gentlemanly. But what startles and vexes me is the sameness between him and Reresby. There is a likeness and yet a difference betwixt them, in all they say and do, that keeps one's attention perpetually on the stretch. Till Sir Herbert came, I thought Matilda's brother the most amusing and original person in the world. He was the first clever young man—the first young man of the world—with whom I was ever in company, for it is no offence to my cousins, Magdalen, to say that the retired life they have led prevents their being *very* polished. But, since I saw Sir Herbert Glynne, I have begun to fear that what I took for an exclusive charm and particular merit, is only the jargon of a class. I am afraid that, if I went into the world, I should see hundreds and hundreds of Reresbys."

"But why *afraid*? If you find Mr. Mordaunt so agreeable, you ought to rejoice that others are equally pleasant."

"Rejoice!—oh, no. It is mortifying to feel that one has been cheated into over-admiration of anything or anybody!" cried Emma, little dreaming how apparent to her cousin was the excess of her admiration of the brother of her friend. "There seemed something so brilliant in the sallies of Reresby—something so wonderful in his travels—something so buoyant in his spirits. I certainly *did* think there was but *one* such in the world! And now"—

She had not time to finish the sentence. The sudden appearance of her father gave a new turn to her thoughts. But, just as she was beginning to tell him that he was come exactly in time to escort Magdalen back to the Hall, a fine, tall young man appeared behind the Rector—away from whom poor Emma looked so pointedly as to justify to her cousin the theory she had so recently been broaching.

"Here is my friend Reresby, my dear, anxious to lay at your feet the first landrails we have seen this year; but scrupulous about parading his shooting-jacket in presence of ladies."

As soon as his daughter had reassured their visitor by a sufficient welcome, the Rector proceeded to present him to his niece. At the moment, indeed, he forgot that there existed the slightest cause for demur. At the moment he saw in Reresby only a guest under his roof. But even when he came to recollect the enmity between the Hall and Deasmarsh, he experienced no regret at having obeyed the first impulse of his cordial nature. Who could say but an acquaintance between the young people might in the end bring about a reconciliation between their parents?

By the assiduity with which young Mordaunt endeavoured to recommend himself to the gentle girl into whose presence he had thus unexpectedly stumbled, it was clear that *he* at least cherished no rancour against the family. Nay, a more suspicious man than the open-hearted Jacob might have been tempted to fancy that the eagerness with which young Mordaunt had jumped over a stile to join him in the glebe pastures, and the pertinacity with which he followed him to his own door, might arise from previous knowledge that his lovely niece was housed under his roof.

Nothing, however, was easier than to find topics of conversation. Apologies for the freedoms taken by Don and Donna were followed by allusions to a thousand facts and a variety of personages belonging to the neighbourhood, tending to prove that if it were only the preceding day Reresby had obtained ocular demonstration that he resided within two miles of an angel, popular report had long satisfied him of the fact.

Unused to the company of strangers, although the marble purity of Magdalen's complexion afforded no outward token of embarrassment or emotion, the varying intonation of her voice evinced no want of sympathy in the compliments she was receiving, or the generosity with which her good deeds were brought home to her. And when to innumerable kind expressions Reresby Mordaunt added an assurance of the regret and disappointment experienced by his sister and himself that, in a neighbourhood so limited, they should be excluded from the society of—he was going to say its brightest ornament—but the prudence of second thoughts induced him to modify the phrase into so near a relative of his friends at the Rectory, Magdalen did not hesitate to admit a reciprocal regret. All that was earnest, all that was feeling in the young sportsman's expressions and demeanour, appeared to *her* the natural result of his preference of her cousin. She must, in fact, have been deaf not to overhear poor Emma's aside to her visitor, while she was tying on her bonnet to return home escorted by her uncle, of—"Did I not tell you how much you would like her?—did I not assure you she was as pleasing as she is good and beautiful?" Nay, even when Reresby replied by a burst of enthusiastic panegyric, all that Magdalen experienced was gratitude towards the kind girl who, present or absent, was so warm a friend; and

it was only want of self-possession that prevented her reminding her uncle, when Reresby proposed accompanying them so far on their way as the confines of the domain of Cromer Hall, that her father might be seriously displeased on hearing of her intimacy with any member of the Mordaunt family.

The impetuosity of Reresby's character and manner, however, imposed silence on her gentle nature; and when, on arriving at the green lane that led towards Deasmill, and separated Deasmarsch and the glebe from the plantations of the Hall, he extended his hand towards her instead of raising his hat as she expected, it was impossible to withhold her own.

Though, while slowly ascending the hill, leaning upon her uncle's arm, she did not once glance back towards the path he must be pursuing, to ascertain whether he were watching their ascent, she felt, with the instinct in which even the least coquettish of her sex is not deficient, that his eyes were fixed upon their movements till they reached the very door of the Hall. Yes! Emma was right. He *was* a person of singularly ingratiating manners. The frankness of his air, the sparkling intelligence of his eye, the apparent earnestness of his desire to find sympathy in those with whom he was conversing, added a thousand graces to his person. Magdalen admitted to herself that she had never seen any man so attractive. He appeared to be as warm-hearted as her uncle, as animated as her cousin. If Miss Mordaunt were only half so charming, how great was her loss in the feud that exiled her from Deasmarsch!

The number of times that the daughter of the Squire pondered these thoughts in her mind in the course of that tedious evening would be hard to reckon; and almost equally often was she forced to remind herself that she was unpardonable in envying the consideration for his daughter's happiness evinced by her uncle, in the suppression of his dislikes and cultivation of his friendships. The Rector's political principles, for instance, were ultra-conservative; yet, for the sake of sociability and the advantage of his parish, he avoided the possibility of a misunderstanding with a neighbour whose views were so adverse to his own, by declining all political controversy.

"I am too old and too obstinate to be converted," was his plea on the first attempt made by Mr. Mordaunt to engage him in a discussion on free-trade; "nor will I pay you so poor a compliment, my dear sir, as to fancy your opinions so ill-considered as to be overturned by any argument of mine. Let each, therefore, keep his prejudices close as his account-books. We shall have enough and to spare to fight about, betwixt the old and new school of farming, without flinging ourselves headlong into the raging gulf of politics."

"If it were only possible," thought Magdalen, "to moderate in

the same manner the petulance of my father! But, alas! every day serves to widen the breach between us and Deasmarsh."

How was it, in fact, to be repaired, so long as Vickers the attorney obtained his living out of the maintenance of the feud? The action now pending was giving rise to a correspondence, such as it required all the gentlemanly feeling of Mr. Mordaunt to treat with temper. Not a day but the cross-post from Northampton brought further grounds of aggravation; and now that the chaste loveliness of Magdalen Cromer had bespoken the indulgence of Reresby, he, on the other hand, had no patience with the circumstantiality with which Mr. Ghrimes, his father's man of business, considered it his duty to dilate upon the insults of the Squire, whom they all knew to be a fool; or his attorney, whom they all suspected to be a knave.

"Where is the good of keeping open the raw?" said he to his sister one day, when his father had amused them by reading aloud at breakfast one of these provoking statements of what had been better left unstated. "I am convinced that, were there no such things as lawyers in the world, half the squabbles that beget ill blood in human nature would collapse and fall to the ground."

"And yet I sometimes wish my father would treat them otherwise than as a joke!" observed Matilda, deeply hurt that Sir Herbert, who was present, should have been admitted behind the scenes. "If, in the first instance, he had taken up the matter more seriously with our good Rector, he would undoubtedly have brought about a better understanding with his brother; but, so long as Jacob is allowed to fluctuate like a bat between the two armies, he has no motive for promoting a reconciliation. Even Emma, who has been made so much of in this house, and enjoyed herself here so much more than at the Hall, evidently looks upon her uncle as the great man, who cannot be expected to descend on light ground from his superiority of birth and station!"

Little suspecting that this unusual bitterness was produced by a spice of the jealousy inherent in every female nature, Reresby began to fear that Matilda, too, was disposed to stimulate the antagonism he was anxious to lay at rest. He fancied that *she* too cherished vindictive feelings against the Hall!"

It certainly was not likely to soften them, that, in the course of the next ten days, her brother so often contrived to engage his friend Sir Herbert Glynne in walks, and rides, and drives, and visits, that brought them into company with the two cousins. Reresby Mordaunt (into whose head it had never entered that the man whose entire confidence he believed himself to possess was secretly attached to his sister) having mentioned to Sir Herbert, previous to the arrival of the Melfont family at Deasmarsh, that, though their son and heir had been refused by Matilda, such was the strength of his attachment, and such the desire of Lord and

Lady Melfont to see her his wife, that her parents had sanctioned the renewal of his addresses, he considered that he had no right to avail himself of his facilities, as a guest under the roof of the Mordaunts, to frustrate a match so advantageous. "No, no! since they could put up with nothing short of a coronet, the insignificant individual with two left arms and two left legs, and an equally halting understanding, whom his peerage in perspective was supposed to render worthy the regard of one of the most charming girls in England, should not be cheated of his chance."

And as it was difficult for Sir Herbert to explain the disappointment of his projects to account for a sudden curtailment of his visit, the utmost he could do was to leave a fair field for George Melfont, by pertinaciously accompanying his friend Reresby, during the remainder of his stay at Deasmarsh, in his shootings, fishings, ramblings, and intrusions at the Rectory.

While this inseparability was imputed by poor Matilda to admiration of the pretty, childish Emma, Sir Herbert, too absorbed by the contrarieties of his situation to take much heed of the fluctuations of feeling of his friend, and convinced that the "bachelor's button" was still the secret object of his admiration, he fancied that he was doing him a favour, whenever they chanced upon Emma and her cousin in their rides or walks, by addressing his conversation exclusively to Magdalen, so as to remove all obstacle from his laughing and chatting with the Rector's daughter,—an attention which tempted poor Reresby to wish that his fidus Achates would occasionally fulfil the duties of country visiting, by devoting attendance to the ladies of the house in which he was staying. For to Reresby it appeared impossible that one who had looked face to face upon the pure and intellectual beauty of Magdalen, could from that moment conceive any other female face worthy a moment's consideration; and once when, having chanced to meet her with her cousin in a straggling coppice at the extremity of the glebe, Sir Herbert not only insisted upon carrying for Miss Cromer a basket of wood-sorrel roots which she had been to seek in the woods to be transplanted into her own garden, but inquired whether it was forbidden to *him* as well as to Mr. Mordaunt's son to escort them as far as the door of the Hall, in a fit of momentary irritation, young Mordaunt was tempted to regard such a proposition on the part of his friend as almost a declaration of love. So vague were the answers he addressed to poor Emma for the remainder of the walk, so heated appeared his brow, and so strange his deportment, that she scarcely knew what to make of him.

"I wish I could persuade you, Miss Cromer," said Sir Herbert, meanwhile, in a bantering tone (into which, on any other occasion, Reresby would have freely entered), "that I came straight from the railway-station to Deaswold; that I was the keeper of a

menagerie, or a bagman travelling with samples of sewing cotton or Scotch cambric; or one of the jackals of the Mendicity Society, or any other character, rather than a guest at Deasmarsh! It is rather hard upon an inoffensive party like myself to be tabooed, as a punishment for being the friend of an individual of the name of Mordaunt; and, I assure you, it is doing me and yourselves a great injustice to exclude me from Cromer Hall. Send my friend Reresby to Coventry as thoroughly as you please. Suspicious characters of *his* kind cannot be kept at too great a distance. We would *all* send him to Coventry if we could. Your excellent uncle at the Rectory has, in fact, hinted to me that he finds the frequency of his visits a considerable nuisance."

"My father? Dear Magdalen, I am sure you will not believe anything of the kind!" cried Emma, panting with indignation.

"I hope you do not imagine that Mr. Cromer would confide his sentiments on such subjects to one of your tender years?" cried Sir Herbert, not a little amused by the genuine storm of indignation which his irony had called up in the hazel eyes usually so mirthful. "Even to *me*, he spoke seriously on the subject, only in the hope that my intervention might secure him from a continuance of the evil!"

"I wonder you are not ashamed to assert such a thing, Sir Herbert Glynne!" cried Emma, with increasing disgust.

"Trust me, lady fair, I have lived too long to be ashamed of *any* thing," replied Sir Herbert gravely, "unless sometimes of allowing the natural modesty of my character to interfere with the discharge of a duty: such, for instance, as that of carrying the basket, which even to *my* muscular arm is no trifling burden, as far as the door of Cromer Hall, instead of sneaking off when we reach the lodge, like a poacher when a keeper comes in sight."

"I should be happy to introduce you to my father and mother," interposed Magdalen, becoming apprehensive, from the countenances of both Reresby Mordaunt and Emma, of some bitter rejoinder, "had not the recent severe affliction in my family closed their doors against all but our nearest relations."

Even the forced spirits of Sir Herbert Glynne were tranquilized by the grave sadness of her voice; and they parted at the usual spot, with less perhaps than the customary regret.

CHAPTER IX.

Men of good birth are noted to be envious towards new men when they rise; for the distance is altered, and it is like a deceit of the eye, that when others come on they think themselves go backward.—BACON.

For some time past, the cordiality between the Hall and Rectory had suffered some interruption; and even the intimacy of the two

girls became gradually affected by the change. The sacrifices continually made by Emma to prevent her cousin Magdalen from fancying herself neglected for the sake of Deasmarsh, were at length *felt* to be sacrifices; for, now that she had attained the age of reason, the grave cousin who, as being three years older than herself, had evinced during her childhood an almost motherly indulgence for her frowardness, now called her to account whenever she considered her in fault. Such at least were the motives which each assigned to herself for seeing less of her cousin. The Cromer Hall family noticed nothing of the change; the Squire being too much occupied with his farm, and the Squire's wife with the domestic economy of her household, to take heed of such trifles as the comfort or proceedings of their daughter. Resenting in the bitterness of their souls the familiarity of the Rector of Deaswold with his chief parishioner, they were, in fact, better pleased that Magdalen should find less attraction in a house where she was exposed to the chance of meeting the various members of the Mordaunt family.

It might be a similar apprehension that so often averted Miss Cromer's morning walks from the Rectory, to which, of old, they were almost daily directed — more particularly since her accidental introduction to Reresby. The eagerness with which he had profited by the first opportunity to make her acquaintance, placed her on her guard against encountering Miss Mordaunt in a spot where Matilda's studied coldness might perhaps evince resentment of the affronts heaped on her family by that of Cromer Hall. For Magdalen was sufficiently a physiognomist to have noticed, when occasionally her eyes met those of Miss Mordaunt on entering or quitting Deaswold Church, that the manufacturer's daughter had reassumed her former severity of mien. Even her salutations to Emma were tinctured by a certain degree of reserve. The lighter-hearted cousin, perhaps, might not perceive it. But this Magdalen taxed against her as a fault. She *ought* to perceive it. She *ought* to be forearmed against coolness on the part of rich people from whom she accepted advantages she was unable to return. For, as it could not of course enter into the conjectures of Magdalen that Miss Mordaunt laid to the charge of Emma's girlish coquetties the fact that Sir Herbert Glynné, in spite of his unconcealed joy at seeing her again, had become gradually distant in his manner, and at length quitted Deasmarsh without further indication of preference, she set down the coolness, which was in reality the result of wounded feelings, to the vulgar hauteur of a *parvenue*. By neither Matilda nor Magdalen was it surmised that if Sir Herbert Glynné found his way to Deaswold Rectory oftener than was desirable, and occasionally when he must have known the Rector to be engaged elsewhere, it was solely at the suggestion of Reresby. Either because some atonement seemed owing to Emma for the thought-

less manner in which his own attentions had been both accorded and withdrawn, or because he fancied that the happiness of both parties would be ensured by a mutual attachment, he was always finding pretexts for despatching Sir Herbert to the Rectory; where, sooth to say, he employed his visit in eliciting from Emma anecdotes of the sheepishness of George Melfont and the ineptitude of the whole Melfont family; and repaid the readiness with which the poor girl supplied him with Melfontiana, by stories of Reresby's triumphs at college, prowess in travel, and popularity with all the world; such as, by the time her visitor took leave, had dyed her young cheek with permanent crimson. The daughter was too ignorant of the ways of the world, and the father too hospitable and simple-hearted, to discern anything unusual in these almost daily visits. Conscious that to herself they were rendered charming only by affording information concerning Reresby, Emma, indeed, said nothing about the matter; and it was only the acuteness of jealousy which enabled Miss Mordaunt to discover how large a portion of Sir Herbert's mornings were spent apart from her brother. For a moment she was almost tempted to repent having opened the eyes of Reresby to the intellectual inferiority of the girl to whom he had shown some disposition to attach himself. Still, it was severe retribution upon her fastidiousness as a sister, to have the little village coquette throw herself at the head of Sir Herbert Glynne!

Of the result of his projects in favour of his friend, Reresby, on the other hand, took little heed. His thoughts were otherwise engaged. Whatever the party assembled at Deasmars, or however good the sporting when they repaired together to the battues at Settringham Abbey, nothing now appeared to arrest his attention.

"My son is taking up his new vocation in good earnest," was his father's explanation to his neighbours of the young man's altered deportment. "The constitutional studies which his travels had caused him a little to neglect, occupy his whole time; and my son is going through a steady course of English law and parliamentary history. When once he has taken his seat, there will be little time for reading; and I am thankful to find him so reasonable as to forestall the difficulty."

So gullible, indeed, was the man who, abounding in good faith, suspected no ill at the hands of others, that, even if less desirous that Reresby should not accompany his family on their Lancashire expedition, he would have readily acceded to his son's suggestion, that "it would be as well he should remain at Deasmars during their absence, and quietly follow up the line of study he had traced out."

"I shall not be sorry," whispered he to his wife, "to have a sight of Claudia before the marriage is actually proposed to our young M.P. When they parted, nearly four years ago, I admit that she did

not promise much. But in the course of the month we are about to spend with Freshley, you, my dear, will have opportunities of judging her fairly; and, if all be as we could wish, before the close of the visit, Reresby can be sent for to spend a few days with us, and decide for himself.

And Reresby was accordingly left behind to devote himself to his "constitutional studies." For some weeks ensuing, indeed, he was so completely absorbed by this excellent purpose, as no longer to be seen cantering on his favourite hack on the road to the station, or sauntering with Don and Donna at his heels, followed, in his transit through the village, by the benedictions of the poor. The neighbourhood, seeing nothing of him, believed him to have accompanied his family to the North; and he was consequently unmolested by invitations.

"I lead the life of a hermit," said he, in a letter to his father after rendering an account of some commissions he had executed in the village, "never crossing the bounds of the domain, except to church! Your hint, or rather Matilda's hint, concerning the expectations that might arise from my visits to the Rectory, prevent my seeing as much as formerly of our excellent friend there; who, finding me so unworthy a son of one of the best farmers in Northamptonshire, is, I suspect, easily reconciled to the loss of my company."

Not even Matilda, who was present when the letter was read aloud to her mother, surmised that, while telling the truth and nothing but the truth, the *whole* truth was not unfolded by her brother; or that, if Reresby were living the life of a hermit, it was

"A hermit, with an angel for his guest!"

or, above all, that, if he eschewed the society of the Rectory, it was to avoid the danger of cross-examination concerning his occupations. The truth was that, if content to limit his rides and walks to his father's beautiful grounds, it was only because secure therein from all chance of intrusion on the part of Cromer of Cromer Hall. It was not, however, as may be surmised, that Reresby was afraid to trust his temper in an encounter with one who had been heard to indulge in gross abuse of his father. The time for *such* a peril was past. It was that he had no mind to look in the face the father of Magdalen,—Magdalen, his mere introduction to whom had brought down upon her the reprehension of her parents; and who would probably have incurred their malediction could it have been surmised how readily she had allowed the acquaintance to ripen into friendship, and (though unavowedly) from friendship into a fonder feeling. It would be difficult to say how soon, or at what moment, the chance meetings brought about by Reresby's watchful assiduity had justified the avowal of his admiration. But, howbeit the habits of England

render it criminal to indulge in those feelings and hasty avowals which the exquisite genius of Shakspeare has appropriately adapted to the promptings of an Italian clime, the pure and gentle nature of Magdalen Cromer did not wholly recoil from the addresses by which, after risking an intrusion into the shrubberies of the Hall, he made it clear that in the sunshine of her favour

“either he must live, or have no life.”

In the first instance, perhaps, terror wrought more upon her feelings than inclination, to pronounce the forgiveness without which the rash young man refused to quit the spot. She trembled lest he should be found there by her father. *She* knew, better than he could guess, the coarseness of word and deed into which that father was capable of being excited. “Yes, yes! I fully forgive you,” faltered she, while he pressed within his own her trembling hand. “Only go, Mr. Mordaunt, only leave me; only be careful to quit the premises unseen. I will—I *do* pardon this one intrusion, on condition that it be not repeated!” added she, eagerly, on perceiving his unwillingness to obey. “Believe me, I will not think of you unkindly. I will never resent your conduct. But oh! for kindness’ sake, leave me. Do not,—do not expose me to the displeasure of my father!”

A second interview, if the source of equal terror, was even less resented than the first. It was the only time that beautiful and companionless girl had listened to the language of admiration, still less the eloquence of a lover’s protestations. In Reresby Mordaunt she saw all that could captivate the eye of woman or attach her affections. Young, handsome, gentlemanly, intelligent, devoted, romantic, Romeo himself was not more enterprising or more gifted to make enterprise excused. After the first stolen interview, it was less culpable than natural that the girl so devoid of sympathy in her own family should dwell incessantly upon the meeting, till time brought about the renewal of that forbidden pleasure.

It is almost an act of sacrilege to lift the veil from a heart so innocent. Let it remain uncertain, therefore, with which of the two originated the unguarded proposal, after several of these hazardous encounters, that they should agree on some place of meeting less open to surprise. In her father’s grounds, however reassured by fond encouragement, Magdalen never ceased to tremble lest a violent arm should be suddenly laid upon her companion. It was not of herself she thought. She had ceased to think of herself. All she cared for now was that the man who showed himself ready to brave the whole world for her sake, should be secured against unnecessary hazard.

“To attempt any explanation with Mr. Cromer, in his present state of feeling towards my family, dearest Magdalen,” he had

argued, "would be to bring down upon ourselves prohibitions fatal to our future happiness. We must trust to time, therefore; we must trust to our own prudence."

"Alas! neither to time *nor* prudence!" rejoined Miss Cromer. "You *would* not, were you acquainted with my father. His prejudices are ineradicable. Be satisfied that nothing we could say or do would ever induce him to consent to our union."

"Then we must some day or other take courage to dispense with it!" rejoined Reresby with spirit. "Mr. Cromer has nothing to urge against the honour or credit of my family; and the opinion of the world would fully uphold our independence."

"The opinion of the world would avail nothing against my respect for my father's authority," said his companion, with a mournful wave of the head.

"There comes a time in every human life, my dearest Magdalen," argued the lover, "when parents should appeal to the reason rather than the submission of their children,—when *they* must cease to be arbitrary, or expect that *we* should cease to be dutiful. *My* father—I thank God for so great a blessing—prizes the happiness of his children far beyond the care of his pride; and, unhandsomely as he has been used by Mr. Cromer, if he saw my future comfort in life depend on marrying into the family, his consent would not be withheld."

Magdalen dared not avow that the pride of Cromer of Cromer Hall was sacred in his eyes as an article of religion, lest she should seem to convey disparagement to the Mordaunts; but it was with divided attention she listened to Reresby's statement that, on his entrance into parliament, a settlement was to be made upon him fully adequate to the maintenance of a family. "And then, dearest," continued he, fixing his impassioned eyes on the contour of her beautiful countenance, "then, Magdalen, I must endeavour to persuade you to share with me, in defiance of everybody and everything, the competence that will enable us to be all in all to each other. Together, we shall be rich. Together, dearest, we shall be happy. Your affection will stimulate me to untiring exertions in public life. From *you* I shall derive higher impulses of action. All that my father expects of me, all that I would fain become, in order to do honour to my country, will come to pass in the fosterage of such a home as ours."

Such was the encouragement under which Magdalen Cromer consented to the clandestine meetings urged upon her by her lover; and, as his family was now on the eve of quitting Deasmarsh for the North, leaving his time entirely at his disposal, unexpected facilities were afforded to the accomplishment of his wishes.

"It is clear, dear Magdalen," argued he, in a hurried interview with the object of his attachment, immediately after the departure

of his family, "that, to secure ourselves from reach of Mr. Cromer, the spot we choose must be on my father's property. Leave it to me to select some place, easily attainable to yourself, where we may converse in security and peace."

If Magdalen did not expressly *assent* to the proposal, her resistance was only such as, to a lover's ear, implies the unpronounced affirmative.

CHAPTER X.

Now Romeo is belov'd and loves again,
 Alike bewitch'd by the charm of looks;
 And to his foe suppos'd he must complain,
 And she, steal Love's sweet bait from fearful hooks.
 Being held a foe, he may not have access
 To breathe such vows as lovers use to swear,
 And she, as much in love, her means much less,
 To meet her new beloved anywhere:
 But passion lends them power: time, means to meet.

SHAKSPEARE.

In a bushy dingle adjoining the Deas (a rapid stream, formerly the boundary between Hutton's farm and the property of old Smith, but now so skilfully widened as to form a chief ornament of the beautiful domain of Deasmarsh), stood a tenement, the cause of no small portion of the discord prevailing between its proprietor and Cromer Hall; having been constructed soon after his acquisition of the property, with the intention of converting it into a water-mill for the use of his household, had not the jealous lord of the manor, to whom belonged the water-meadows higher up and lower down the stream, interfered with his intentions. Unable to conceive an establishment on so vast a scale as to require a corn-mill for its use, Mr. Cromer foresaw a fall in the rent of the windmill on his own property when the lease should fall in; and a lawyer's letter was consequently despatched to his new neighbour, which, under the advice of Ghrimes of Northampton, prevented his putting his projects into execution. The mill machinery was consequently abandoned:

"Hopper, stone, and wheel,"

lay disjointed and useless on the premises, half hidden by nettles as luxuriant as the malice of the Squire; and, pending the dedication of the premises to some other purpose, the adjoining dwelling-house, known by the name of Deasmill, was assigned to the use of an old servant of Mr. Mordaunt, who, shortly after their arrival at Deasmarsh, had retired from office by intermarrying with the ex-bailiff or "looker" of Hutton's farm. Clemson and his wife, though too old for active service, spurned the idea of being pensioned off as useless; to gratify which praiseworthy pre-

tension, Mr. Mordaunt complied with their whim of fancying themselves still on active service, by placing nominally, under the old man's charge, the young plantations whose care was an especial hobby of his own. The house was, consequently, finished and fitted up with more care than is usually bestowed on such tenements. Matilda herself had assisted in parcelling out and filling with flowers and beehives the little garden surrounding it, till it became an ornament to the estate. It was only at the Hall (from whence the unfinished mill was discernible in the distance) that no regret was felt at the obstacle to the completion of what would have added another active feature to that fair and thriving landscape. The key of the unfinished works was left, meanwhile, in the custody of Clemson, who so seldom invaded the premises that, as has been already observed, the waste ground was overgrown with docks, and nettles, and the aspiring bells of the foxglove; while into the mill itself nothing but the summer sun was at the pains to penetrate. Such was the spot selected by Reresby, to shelter the trembling hind he had contrived to allure within his bounds. The Clemsons were his devoted creatures. The old lady, who had waited upon his infancy, regarded the son of her mistress as a youthful prince, whose will was as the law of the Medes and Persians; while her husband was not only clownishly submissive to the authority of Deasmarsh, as to that of the richest dynasty of the district, but full of abhorrence of the Squire, who, when Hutton's farm was held by hands less influential than those of Mr Mordaunt, had oppressed and harassed his humble neighbours in a spirit of petty despotism worthy of feudal times. Next, therefore, to the satisfaction of obliging one of the name of Mordaunt, old Clemson was disposed to prize an opportunity of spiting one of the name of Cromer; and, when it was whispered to him by his wife that the young lady, for whose behoof "Master Reresby" was desirous of obtaining the key of the mill-works, was no other than the daughter of the Squire, that on the quiet bench, sheltered among its up-springing alders and hazel-bushes, they might enjoy occasional interviews secure from the scrutiny of Cromer Hall, there was a spice of malicious joy in the readiness with which he surrendered his charge into the keeping of his master's son.

And now, secure in themselves and each other, Magdalen and he of whom she had pledged herself to become the wife, enjoyed their almost daily interviews. A hurried walk through the shrubberies of Cromer Hall brought the trembling girl into the green lane leading direct to Deasmill; and the slightest errand to the Rectory or village formed a pretext for escape from home. Every day that brought them better acquainted added new charm to interviews sweet, from the first, with the sweetness said to be attached to all stolen pleasures; and Magdalen soon learned to esteem as a

friend the man who, in the first instance, had simply captivated her fancy. Nor was she long in commanding from Reresby a degree of reverence, rarely the portion of one so young and fair. Conscious that the return of his family into Northamptonshire, and the arrival of her brothers from college, must put an end to the happiness they were enjoying, they prized it only the more from being forced to number the golden sands in their glass.

"I sometimes tremble," whispered Magdalen as they sat together on the old bench, noting with regret that even the foliage by which it was surrounded, though the most tenacious of all verdure, was beginning to fall under the influence of early frost; "I sometimes tremble lest poor Emma should perceive how seldom I now visit the Rectory, and suffer her suspicions to be aroused. Though you assure me that, after her acquaintance with Sir Herbert Glyme, she ceased to take much interest in your proceedings, surely it must strike her as strange that you scarcely ever wait upon my uncle?"

"Do not be afraid! Aware of my father's desire that I should apply myself in earnest to my studies, the good Rector is convinced that I am shut up with my Hansard and blue paper-books, whetting the edge of my wits. Depend on it, dearest, he perfectly approves my absence. But why do you not occasionally contrive to see your cousin?"

"Because I have not courage to look her in the face! To confide in her is out of the question. Even if her discretion were to be relied on, I have no right to perplex her sense of right and wrong by admitting that I am deliberately deceiving my parents. Be the blame of these furtive meetings on my own head! I must not injure Emma by my example. Still, to impose upon one with whom I have lived on terms of sisterly affection, is an act of treachery I cannot attempt."

Unable to blind himself to the tears that rolled down the pure pale cheeks of Magdalen, as she alluded to the deceit she was practising, and already chilled by painful presentiments, Reresby shrank within himself while the shrivelled leaves were whirled in eddies round them by the gusts of the fitful breeze. It was a dreary time. The water-flowers on the margin of the Deas were withering on their reedy stems. The stream, swollen by autumnal rains, rose threateningly to the summit of the bank, so that its coarse herbage was partly submerged. Little temptation to be sitting under the open sky on such a spot at such a season! Not a token or portent of good was discernible to those sufficiently ill at ease within themselves to look anxiously abroad for omens.

"If I am to see you thus unhappy, my own dear Magdalen, from the mere anticipation of our separation," whispered Reresby, when, under the influence of that universal dreariness, the tears of his companion increased so as to demand his aid in wiping

them away, "I vow to Heaven I will risk the worst at once! We cannot be made *more* miserable by Mr. Cromer's severity! And there is always a chance that the cry of nature in his heart may plead something in our favour."

Somewhat better acquainted than himself with the heart in question, Magdalen roused herself from her despondency to implore him to refrain from such an act of madness as a premature and precipitate disclosure. "We must trust in Providence and each other," said she; "for at present, believe me, nothing must be attempted with my father. And if—"

Her own name pronounced in an eager whisper, apparently at her elbow, suspended the words of remonstrance on her lips; when Reresby, starting up, perceived through the nearly leafless branches the face of old Mrs. Clemson, full of mysterious importance, beckoning him towards her garden palings. "Either lock yourselves into the mill, or let the young lady come round into my house," said she, "for, as sure as life, Mr. Reresby, there's folks upon the watch in the lane!"

The former alternative presented so much the greater temptation, that Reresby, in communicating to Magdalen the old lady's panic, did not so much as allude to the second proposition. Till all probability of espial seemed out of the question, therefore, they remained in their retreat, still absorbed by the discussion in which Mrs. Clemson's fears had surprised them. But when at length, after Reresby had previously beat the bushes and examined every lurking place, Magdalen ventured forth and hurried across the lane into her uncle's meadows, with the intention of paying a short visit at the Rectory as a pretext for her absence from home, young Mordaunt almost repented not having accepted Mrs. Clemson's thoughtful offer. For scarcely had the mourning garments of Magdalen disappeared in the distance, when he distinctly saw one of the Squire's labourers emerge from behind a pollard willow, situated a few yards above the entrance to Clemson's garden, and start off at speed in the direction of the Hall! To overtake the fugitive, and by bribes or threats secure his discretion, was Reresby's first impulse. But he found that the man was already out of sight. Nor had he courage to follow Miss Cromer and endeavour to warn her of what had occurred, lest the dread of finding herself in her father's presence, under such circumstances, should prevent her returning home. He had seen her tremble at mere mention of her father's name; more especially since the irritations of his feud with Deasmarsh stimulated his ever stubborn nature.

"Better trust to chance!" was the monologue of the agitated lover, as he directed his steps across his father's grounds towards the house. "I may be mistaken. The man may have been lurking there on some pilfering errand of his own; and I doubt whether one of the Squire's men *dare* accost him with such a story!

No need therefore unnecessarily to alarm poor Magdalen." Sore, however was his heart within him, when he reflected that, even had not her brothers been on the point of arriving at the Hall, and within a week, his own family at Deasmarsh, the espial he had witnessed would render it unpardonable on *his* part to betray his beloved Magdalen into further peril of detection.

His fears had not, even in the first instance, outstripped the truth. The following day, when Magdalen entered her mother's sitting-room soon after breakfast, to inquire whether Mrs. Cromer had any work or occupation to assign her for the day, her foot was suspended on the threshold by the sound of her father's voice at the highest pitch of exacerbation. Even her mother, rarely excited to anger by anything more important than the discovery that her damask table-cloths had been cut by the carelessness of the footman, or her preserved apricots suffered to eandy, was indulging in epithets that probably pointed at the delinquency of some gadding housemaid. "I could not have supposed the little hussy capable of such conduct!" said she. "I hope, my dear, you mean to place her father on his guard? If the story should get wind, her character would be gone for ever!"

"Gone! It is gone *already*!" cried the Squire, panting with rage. "The whole family is disgraced. If a daughter of mine had been detected in such proceedings, as God is my Judge, she should not have a day's life left in her to repent with! A little viper! And young Mordaunt, too! To choose such a fellow as *that* for the sacrifice of her credit and respectability! To provoke the malediction of her family for the sake of the cotton-spinner's son!"

Panic-struck by the sound of her parents' voices in such extremity of excitement, poor Magdalen now became breathless with emotion. What had Reresby been doing? Whom had he been betraying into folly? That the clandestine meetings at Deasmill could be the subject in discussion, did not at first glance into her mind; so conscious was she that had her father suspected *her* as Reresby's confederate, he would have smitten her senseless to the earth. For a moment all was confusion in her mind; and the faces of her father and mother being averted, instead of proceeding into the room, she leaned heavily and half-fainting against the open door, thanking Heaven for the mistake of persons that had occurred. A convulsive gasp relieving her overcharged bosom, at length attracted the attention of Mrs. Cromer.

"Here is Magdalen," said she, pointing to the door. "Inquire of *her*. Perhaps *she* may know something about the matter."

"I trust not; for *her* sake, I trust not!" cried the enraged Squire. "Woe betide the child of mine that would dare to act as go-between in such a business—woe betide her, I say! If I thought Madge yonder capable of aiding and abetting her cousin, or even

concealing her disgrace, by God Almighty, I would kick her out of my house!"

Even Mrs. Cromer was shocked by his violence. Even Mrs. Cromer seemed to think he was going too far—perhaps, because her daughter had staggered to a chair, and was sitting with her eyes fixed upon the squire's gesticulations, in a state bordering on catalepsy.

"Magdalen is incapable of conduct so foolish or so wicked!" said her mother, striving to pacify her husband. "Magdalen knows as little and *wishes* to know as little of these Mordaunts as we do. Go into your own room, my dear," continued she, assisting her to rise and reach the door, as soon as the poor girl appeared a little recovered. "I want to talk to your father."

And as soon as she had disappeared, Mrs. Cromer hastened to suggest the impropriety of even alluding to a subject so heinous in presence of a modest young girl, like her daughter. It was not for Magdalen to learn that such an act of turpitude as a clandestine meeting at Clemson's farm was so much as possible. She even prayed her husband to be more guarded in his terms and gestures, in presence of their poor child.

"Since the death of her sisters, and particularly of late," resumed Mrs. Cromer, "Madge has been so nervous and delicate, that I cannot bear to have her agitated. If one does but speak a little quick or sharp to her, she starts and turns pale, and the tears come into her eyes for a little or nothing."

"So much the worse! Such megrims always increase by indulgence!" cried the Squire, morosely. "What business has a country girl to be nervous? We shall be having her favouring us with hysterics presently!"

"She is our only one, now," rejoined Mrs. Cromer, with as much sensibility as was in her nature. "We must not forget *that*!"

"*One* may be as great a plague as half a dozen!" cried the Squire, not perceiving the tender drift of the observation. "So pray let me hear no more of such nonsense. As to Emma, I shall communicate what I have discovered to her father, the moment he returns from Northampton. And if my brother don't break every bone in her skin, I shall think very ill of his sense of duty."

"Your brother does not always see things in the same light that *you* do, my dear. Remember the terms on which he chooses to stand with the Mordaunts."

"As parson of the parish, I suppose it isn't to be expected that he should run counter to a wealthy parishioner. But you don't suppose that even Jacob looks upon Mordaunt in the light of a *gentleman*?"

"Lord Melfont does, for he was anxious that his son should marry the daughter."

"The daughter is a personable girl, with whom young Melfont fell in love; and a wilful man must have his way. Such things have happened often enough before now. Lord Buntingford married his washerwoman, and Lord Robert Kildargan his cook. But you cannot think so meanly of Jacob as to fancy that, even when he finds his daughter has been giving young Mordaunt the meeting among hedges and ditches, like a gipsy-wench or a parish 'prentice, he would think the matter mended by marriage? I'm told that Mordaunt's father was a parish-boy! And whatever sneaking thing Jacob may have been tempted to do about Deasmarsh, such a match would be a thing to shame not only *him*, but his kith and kin. Step into the study and cast your eye upon our family tree; and show me the Cromer that has ever demeaned himself by a connection with trade! *Your* grandfather, my dear, was the oldest baronet in the shire, and my mother was sister to Sir Robert Harbuckle. My grandmother—"

Mrs. Cromer, who stood in as little need of instruction in these points as in the Church catechism, ventured to interrupt him by observing that "she should certainly be sorry to see one of her *own* children intermarry with the Mordaunts; but that, as Emma and her father were on terms of intimacy with the family at Deasmarsh, Jacob might perhaps think proper to—"

"I don't know what Jacob may think proper to do!" cried her husband, bursting open, partly with his hand and partly with his foot, the door of a room that was getting too hot to hold him; "but this I can tell you—and I beg you will take care to have it repeated both to your daughter and niece—that if Emma Cromer becomes the wife of a Mordaunt, never does she set foot over my doorway again! And what's more, any one of her cousins that holds communication with her, after such a derogation, is neither son nor daughter of mine!"

CHAPTER XI.

He frequently exposed himself and left his condition worse than it was before; and the *éclaircissement* commonly ended in the discovery of the persons from whom he had received his secret intelligence.

CLARENDON'S HISTORY.

RARELY did the Squire find his way to the Rectory; never, unless he had some personal interest to serve. But, in spite of his objection to waste a moment of the time which he felt due to his peas and beans, his oats, barley, and cattle, in spite even of a mistling rain that would almost have wetted a Highlander, off he went that very afternoon to the village. He felt it his duty to lose no time in making his brother uncomfortable. So disturbed was his

air as he pushed his way into the room where Jacob was quietly engaged in the concoction of the morrow's sermon, that the first impulse of his host was to offer him a glass of wine. He must be wet? Would he have his great coat dried? Would he not adjourn to the library, where there was a fire? No! He chose to sit in his wet things. He preferred damp shoes. He wanted no luncheon. He wished to stay where he was. All he desired was to unburden his mind, and transfer the weight where it would be more galling. Sadly fearing that the manifest discomposure of the Squire might originate with one of his sons, of whose college irregularities rumours had reached his uncle, the kind-hearted Jacob drew towards his brother, prepared to listen with sympathy, and counsel with care; and great indeed was his amazement on finding that the preamble concerning filial delinquencies and the curse attendant on paternity with which Mr. Cromer commenced his narrative, regarded himself and his daughter, rather than the young hopeful of the Hall. Startled as he was, however, when the worst was told, his surprise arose only from the fact that a man in full possession of his faculties, like the Squire, should have allowed himself to be imposed upon by so shallow an invention.

"You cannot surely *believe* this absurd history?" said he, without so much as a cloud upon his countenance; "for, if you did, John, you never would have found courage to tell me so coolly what, if true, would have broken my heart!"

Mr. Cromer, who had been at unusual pains to infuse an air of sympathy into his recital, was a little piqued at the insinuation.

"To show you *my* opinion of the report, (for, after all, it is but a report, and the report of a day-labourer who may have had motives of his own for inventing it)," continued the Rector, "let us refer the question instantly to my girl. You shall hear Emma's unstudied explanation of the business—"

"No! no!—pray don't expose me to a young lady's whimpering!" said the Squire doggedly. "Quite enough to be favoured with scenes and fainting-fits at home! My own daughter's delicate nerves are enough for *me*!"

"I think I can promise you that Emma will let you off without so much as a flood of tears," replied the fond father, with a smile.

"Then I promise you that her boldness in denying what I know from an eye-witness to be true," retorted the Squire, "won't be a jot the more to my taste!"

"At all events, since you think so seriously of the business as to have judged it necessary to communicate to me, concerning my motherless girl, what you knew would inflict infinite pain," said the Rector, more gravely, "I must exact, my dear brother, that you allow your niece an opportunity of vindication."

And the stern manner in which he quitted the room and traversed the hall towards Emma's sitting-room carried with it so much authority, that his elder brother followed him with the same silent sense of inferiority as when he beheld him officiating in the robes of his sacred calling at the communion-table, or beside the open grave of his daughters.

"My dear Emma," said the Rector, as the solitary girl who was installed in the window-seat, occupied either with the needlework in her hand or in watching the dead leaves contending in eddies with the autumnal rain that soddened the half-withered lawn, who started up on their entrance, as if to disguise the reverie in which she was surprised, "my dear Emma, have you ever, pray, on any pretext, or for any cause whatever, visited Deasmill?"

"Deasmill? Yes, papa!" she replied, still a little confused by their sudden entrance.

"You see!" exclaimed her exulting uncle, while her father, not a whit dismayed, drew her by the arm towards the chair in which he had placed himself, while his brother was triumphantly installed on the hearth-rug.

"And what took you there, my dear?"

"Mrs. Clemson is an old servant of the Mordaunt family."

Again the Squire glanced exultingly at his brother.

"And they all frequently visit her and take an interest in the prosperity of her little household."

"And *you*, too, I presume, Miss Emma, take an interest in the old woman's concerns?" sneered her uncle, overjoyed at his justification.

"I am ashamed to say that I have never thought of her since the family have been away!" replied his niece, blushing for her neglect. "I used to go there with Matilda and Mrs. Mordaunt. But, as the Clemsons are above the world and want for nothing, I had no object in crossing the water-meadows so late in the year. I hope, papa, nothing has happened to either of the old people?"

It was now the Rector's turn to say, "You see!" But he forbore.

"And you are ready to declare that you were not at Deasmill yesterday, between two and three o'clock?" harshly persisted her uncle.

"I did not leave the house yesterday, uncle. We spent the morning together (did we not, papa?), making an inventory of the books that wanted binding."

"Do you mean to say," resumed the Squire, addressing his brother, "that you did not lose sight yesterday of your daughter?"

"Not for more than half an hour at a time, when people came to me on justice business. And half an hour would not suffice to carry her to Deasmill and back," said Jacob, drawing his daughter

still more affectionately towards him, and imprinting a kiss upon her forehead.

"But if I *had* gone to Deasmill, papa, would there have been any harm in it?" inquired the astonished Emma.

"Only if the scandal were true, my dear, which some mischievous knave has set about, that you went there to meet Reresby Mordaunt unknown to *me*!"

"Unknown to *you*? Have you then any objection to our meeting?" inquired the puzzled girl. "And if he wanted to see either of us, why go to Deasmill instead of coming here? If the trouble of crossing a few fields could prevent his finding his way as far as the Rectory, we are scarcely likely, papa, to indulge his laziness by meeting him at Mrs. Clemson's!"

"You are now satisfied, I trust, of the groundlessness of your suspicions?" said Jacob, addressing his brother more coldly than was his wont. "I am happy to say that, in my own mind, your statement did not excite so much as the shadow of a doubt. Had it been otherwise, I can scarcely answer for what I might have said or done in retribution of the calumny. As it is, I can afford to limit my indignation to a request that you will dismiss from your service the skulking fellow who, for some bad purpose, has misled you by wanton misrepresentations."

"On that point, I shall decide and act for myself," said the Squire, buttoning up his still steaming great coat, and striding across the room to seek his hat for instant departure. "The girl who could find courage to meet a young man clandestinely in an uninhabited building, is not likely to want face to deny it."

"Do you mean to say, brother," cried Jacob, boiling over with sudden indignation, "that you do not *believe* the explanation so frankly given by my daughter?"

The Squire made no reply. He was apparently engaged in satisfying himself of his hatmaker's address.

"I am not easily put out, John," resumed the Rector, trembling in every limb for very rage, "but there are some things that no man—that is, no *father*—can stand to hear! Don't trifle with me, therefore. This girl," said he, placing his arm round Emma's waist, "this girl is motherless; there is no one to take her part but *me*. Reflect, therefore, before you speak again, whether you have a right to injure her by surmises for which, I pledge you my word as a gentleman and a minister of the Gospel, there is not the slightest foundation!"

"I see no great need for reflection," was the Squire's haughty rejoinder. "Believe what you think proper; but give *me* leave to do the same."

"Give you leave to have more faith in the word of a hedger and ditcher than of my daughter Emma?"

"Considering the company into which you have thought proper to introduce your daughter Emma—"

"Brother!" interrupted Jacob in a loud voice, "before words pass between us that must render us enemies for life, let us part,—let us part quietly, let us afford ourselves time for consideration."

"Nay! If you want to make a quarrel of it, make it and welcome!" growled the Squire, pushing open the library-door and contriving that, as he traversed the hall, his voice should be heard in every part of the house. "Since the Mordaunts came into this country, Jacob, you've found it a better spec. to stick to the cotton-spinner than to *me*. More was to be got by hanging on at Deasmarsh than at Cromer Hall. 'Tisn't often I've entered your doors within the last three years. But, as you've now as good as turned me out of them, Jacob Cromer, may God strike me dead if ever I cross your threshold again!"

So horror-struck were both the Rector and his daughter by the coarse violence of this apostrophe, that the Squire had slammed the house-door after him and disappeared through the gate of the fore-court, before either recovered self-possession to look the other in the face.

"My poor uncle must be out of his mind!" faltered Emma, who was the first to draw breath. "I have sometimes thought so before, when he was so violent without rhyme or reason against Deasmarsh!"

"Out of his mind? No! he is *not* out of his mind! In *that* case I could forgive him!" ejaculated the Rector, struggling with his feelings. "But in cool blood, to advance such things against a child of mine!"

"Dear father, compose yourself!" said Emma, perceiving that the tears were starting from his eyes. "When my uncle comes to himself, he will feel how unjust he has been, and write you an apology." Jacob averted his head. He could not bear even his own dear little daughter to see how thoroughly he was cut up by such cruel conduct on the part of his brother.

But even had the mind of the Squire been open to conviction, even had he possessed sufficient generosity to avow, *when* convinced, that he was in the wrong, no chance, at that moment, of a reaction of feeling! On his return home, he found his sons arrived from Cambridge, a couple of days sooner than he expected them; and, in the excitement of communicating to them the progress of his suits and grievances against the cotton-spinner, he lost sight of all the rest. The petty warfare of parish interests was fought over again and again after dinner, under the influence of the strong ale and heady port which constituted the favourite beverage of Mr. Cromer; and when the indisposition which confined poor Magdalen to her room elicited a few expressions of regret on the part of her brothers, the Squire readily consoled them.

"Take no notice!" said he. "'Tis only one of the incalculable evils connected with Deasmarsh. My brother has espoused the cause of the Mordaunts so warmly as to cause a serious misunderstanding between us. I have made up my mind not to ever enter Jacob's house again. And Magdalen, who is fond of maun-dering and gossiping with her cousin, has taken the squabble to heart."

Even to his sons he did not choose to avow that he had hazarded a slanderous accusation against his niece, which had been distinctly disproved; not knowing that, having offences of their own to avow and indulgence to seek, they were prepared to approve any act short of wilful murder committed by their father.

Of poor Magdalen, meanwhile, the hours were passing miserably. Agitation of mind, supervening on prolonged exposure to weather the preceding day, had brought on a violent attack of fever; and her mother felt called upon to combat, with all the energies of her medicine-chest, a malady for which a few affectionate words would have afforded a more soothing remedy. She *did*, however, unwittingly afford some solace to the invalid, when visiting her chamber in the course of the evening, by replying (when Magdalen alluded to the charges made against her cousin, with every intention of avowing all in case her father persisted in his accusation), "Better dismiss the whole story from your mind, my dear; better dismiss it from your mind! From what I can learn, your father was misinformed. My brother-in-law spent the whole of yesterday with his daughter. Ralph Drewe, who raised the report, must have been drinking, as is often the case with him, and saw double."

"My uncle then is perfectly satisfied?"

"As regards Emma, perfectly! He had a few words, I fancy, with your father. But only on account of those Mordaunts, who, one way or another, are perpetually stirring up strife in the parish."

Had poor Magdalen possessed in either of her brothers what could possibly be converted into a friend or counsellor, she would have profited by their arrival to endeavour to pacify the feud of which her indiscretion was the origin. But the young Cromers, reared with vulgar notions of self-consequence, and deriving the sole interest that vivified their monotonous life at Deaswold from their father's factious war with the "cotton-spinner," were as well disposed as he could wish to second his aggressions. Small as was her knowledge of the world, Magdalen had no difficulty in understanding that, were she to select the present moment of general excitement for the declaration of her sentiments in favour of Reresby, some insult might possibly be offered which, between his high sense of honour and her brothers' bullying disposition, could only be effaced with blood. She determined, therefore, to wait; to wait till she grew stronger and better able to meet reproach;

and, above all, to wait till she could secure a private interview with her kind uncle. Had such a man been her father, she had never been guilty of the concealments that weighed so heavily on her conscience. But, even supported by his aid as a kinsman, she did not despair of making atonement and obtaining forgiveness. The first visit of her brothers to her sick-room afforded, meanwhile, some insight into the state of family politics. After Robert had demanded her congratulations on the refashionment of his dress and appearance, which exhibited the transition of a boor into a "swell"—a transformation about as pleasing as that of a tadpole into a frog—and Stephen marked his contempt of his brother's pretensions by two or three growls of disgust, in admirable keeping with the sullenness of his otherwise handsome countenance, the younger brother saw fit to exhibit his amended perceptions of life by exclamations against the dulness of the Hall.

"I always thought Deaswold the most confoundedly slow place on earth!" cried he. "But, if there were premiums for improvement in stupidity, hang me if it would not beat all competitors out of the field!"

"The place is what it always was!" retorted his brother, in a sulky tone. "It is *you* that are changed, Bob. A couple of terms at Cambridge have made you fancy yourself a fine gentleman."

The individual whose "gent"-ism was thus overrated, protested loudly against the charge.

"When I was a boy," argued he, though the hairs on his chin were still easy of enumeration—"there was tolerable shooting on my father's estate. Four days, at least, in the week, one was sure of sport. But the railroad has cut up *that*. My father says that since the railroad was opened, his game has been gradually disappearing. And for the railroad, whom have we to thank but Mr. Mordaunt?"

"You are paying Mr. Mordaunt a great compliment, Robert," said his sister mildly; "for every one admits that to the railroad is owing the present prosperity of Deaswold."

"What do you mean, Madge, by prosperity?" indignantly rejoined her elder brother. "Is the rent-roll of my father's estate increased? Is he able to raise his rents? Does he get a farthing a quarter more for his wheat?"

"I allude rather to the general prosperity of the village. And the Hall has certainly become a pleasanter residence."

"A far more expensive one—if you call *that* pleasanter!—As my father says, 'nothing so expensive as sociability.'"

"Sociability!" cried Robert, shrugging his shoulders. "What sociability has there been in the neighbourhood, since that vulgar fellow set foot in it? Mordaunt decamped from Lancashire, only because his origin was a trifle too well known there to be agreeable, and that he might set up as a gentleman elsewhere."

"No thanks to him for giving the preference to Deaswold!" cried the sullen Squire-apparent. "As we have no plague of engine-chimneys hereabouts, I don't see why we are to be infested by the order of people whom engine-chimneys worm up out of the mud!"

"Mr. Mordaunt has done a great deal for our charitable institutions," meekly interposed the invalid.

"Of course he has!—If rich upstarts didn't make *that* sacrifice, Madge, what *would* they be good for?"

"There are many old families—the Settringhams for instance—who do nothing of the kind," persisted Magdalen, gravely.

"Because they have their family consequence to keep up, and can't afford it. The Mordaunts are the sort of people who only get on in the world by bestowing broken victuals on the poor, and French dishes on the rich!"

"And the rich are not slow to profit by the advantage," observed his sister; "for the first people in the county have found their way to Deasmarsh."

"No, by Jove, not *all*!" cried Bob, consequentially shaking his head. "The Cromers of Cromer Hall neither have nor ever *will* set foot in the temple of Mammon!"

"I was alluding to the Duke of G—, to Lord Orton, and Lord Longueville,—the lord-lieutenant and county members," said his sister, thus rashly furnishing a list of personages known to the Squire's family but by name, and to himself only at the crisis of a general election.

"I dare say!" retorted her brother. "Turtle and venison afford as deadly a bait to fine folks, as soup-tickets to paupers!"

"Let us hope that many or most of those who show so much respect to Mr. Mordaunt," resumed his sister, "are influenced by knowing how much the pauperism of the district has been diminished by his interference. The neighbourhood is indebted to him for the railroad—"

"Planned for the benefit of his own property."

"It *might* have been equally planned by my father."

"My father had not sufficient parliamentary interest to carry it through."

"My father has had the same opportunities of being acquainted with the lord-lieutenant and county members."

"Ay, but not of getting them to play into his hand! The Duke's a Whig, and the cotton-spinner a Whig; and my father, thank God, a staunch Tory, and plain-sailing country Squire!" cried the indignant Squireling. "The cotton-spinner will, maybe, be member for the county himself, one of these days, for I hear he's buying up every acre of land he can lay his hands on, and scraping his foot to those who've got acres not to be bought. Or, (who knows in these topsy-turvy times?) perhaps, we *may* live to

see him a peer of the realm and lord-lieutenant of the shire,—with a flag flying at Deasmarsh when the family's down; and have it called Deasmarsh Castle or Deasmarsh Abbey, or some confounded nonsense or other! A pleasant sight, eh? for Cromer Hall (established on its hill since Henry the Seventh's time,) to have to look down on such an eyesore!"

"Admit, at least, that it is pleasanter for Cromer Hall to look down on rich plantations and a spreading lake, than upon the swampy meadows and broken fences of Smith's and Hutton's farm?" pleaded Magdalen, mistakenly fancying that, by such home-truths, she was advancing the cause of the Mordaunts. "Surely the air of cheerfulness and activity which the creation of such a seat has produced in the district is—"

But her brothers refused to hear her to an end. The privilege of being a poor weak girl and an invalid did not entitle her to utter such heresies.

"I'll tell you what, Madge" cried Robert, with a swaggering air. "It won't do to have enemies in the camp. My uncle and his daughter have chosen to take up with the cotton-spinner; and the consequence is that *we* have chosen to lay them down. As far as I am concerned, not a word will I ever exchange with either of them. And if *you* are unnatural enough to turn against your own father and brothers, and follow the example of the Rectory, egad, you must bide the consequence, and share their fate!"

"I have not turned against my father," faintly articulated Magdalen. "I have no power to act; and even my opinion of Mr. Mordaunt's merits has never been expressed before."

"Then I promise you, you'd best keep it to yourself, both now and for ever!" cried her elder brother. "My father's not a man to be trifled with, Madge. And, from what I have heard him say, I'm convinced he'd make no bones of turning his back on any one of his children, girl or boy, maid or man, who sided with the blackguards at Deasmarsh!"

CHAPTER XII.

I have consider'd well his loss of time,
And how he cannot be a perfect man,
Not being tried and tutor'd in the world.
Experience is by industry achiev'd,
And perfected by the swift course of time.
Then, tell me, whither were I best to send him?

SHAKSPEARE.

A COUPLE of centuries ago, a Franciscan brother, travelling among the mountains of Styria, was taken ill and gave up the ghost in an obscure village, where his effects were appropriated by the innkeeper to defray the charge of his sickness and interment.

Among his belongings was a small black box, to which, in his lifetime, the deceased appeared to affix the highest value, and which consequently became the first spoil of the cupidity of his host, who, having locked himself into the chamber of the dead man, endeavoured to open the casket. Ignorant of the secret of the spring-lock, he first attempted to peep into the box, by means of a little aperture, ringed with brass, inserted in the lid: when, lo! a shriek of horror summoned his whole household to his aid; the treasure contained in the mysterious box being neither more nor less than the *Devil*! After a momentary glimpse of the horns and claws, the publican fell into a swoon. The inn was instantly deserted. Masses were said in the parish church, and messengers despatched to the Cardinal Archbishop of Salzburg, to inquire by whose hands the imprisoned fiend should be conveyed to Rome, to be delivered into the custody of his Holiness. Luckily, the head covered by the Cardinal's hat was as wise as it was pious. Instantly surmising that the Franciscan friar was a naturalist, and the casket the then rare instrument familiar to us as the microscope, his eminence despatched his secretary to the spot, to put an end to the exorcisms, and demonstrate to the simple population of the village that what they had mistaken for a devil was a harmless insect, whose feet and antennæ were magnified into horns and talons!

By just such a process of magnification did the ignorance of Cromer Hall distort into monstrosity the simplest sayings and doings of the owner of Deasmarsh.

"For some bad purpose worthy of his origin, the Man of Capital was trying to corrupt the morals of the people by an insidious affectation of charity.

"When the dreadful day arrived for the outbreak of popular violence, which all thinking people knew to be surreptitiously preparing, the duke and lord-lieutenant and county members would open their eyes and perceive what they had been about, in consorting with one whose mind was a powder-magazine."

The stoves of the French cook, and the flagstaff into which the conductor affixed to the offices of Deasmarsh was metamorphosed, were not the worst offence of the new place. It was "a hotbed of sedition—a volcano slumbering for a time the better to discharge its fatal missiles, till, some day or other, the burning emissions would set the whole county in flames!"

Such were the ravings of the Squire, whenever he could obtain an auditory among the *dii minores* of the neighbourhood, consisting chiefly of the Northampton pettifogger, at whose suggestion he waged his pounce-and-parchment warfare with Mordaunt, Ghymes, and Co., two elderly spinsters of noble family, residing at a cottage of gentility in the adjacent village of Basinghill, who, shaken off as bores by their relations, were glad to enjoy an occasional orgie

of weak tea and weaker talk at Cromer Hall; and a dull, formal Mr. Aristobulus Settringham, a cousin-german many times removed of Sir William, who, having officiated in his youth as secretary of legation to some infinitesimal German court, and given himself on the strength of it, for the last fifty years, the airs of a diplomat, applauded as oracular the foolish sayings of the only man whose ignorance could be induced to treat him as a retired ambassador.

To Miss Moulsey and Miss Araminta Moulsey, who were as nervous as is customary with elderly spinsters dieted on tracts and saline draughts, Mr. Cromer's denunciations conveyed serious uneasiness; and but that the attorney and old Aristobulus were at hand to satisfy them that the yeomanry cavalry of the county was still in commission, and that the assizes and episcopal visitations held their course, they would probably have been driven to emigration.

The meagre hospitalities at Cromer Hall, that led to these oracular displays of the Squire, being of rare occurrence, it was not such intimations of his continued animosity to the name of Mordaunt that Magdalen had most to fear. But her brothers were untirable in their attacks. There never passed a day, scarcely an hour, without some provoking allusion to the cotton-spinner.

With all due allowance, however, for their mortification at being crossed on the road by young Mordaunt, mounted on his fine hack, while they either trudged through the mud or jogged along on some brute as vicious as themselves, for which the Squire was unable to obtain a market—and seeing, whenever business took them to the railway-station, packet upon packet delivered to the Deasmarsh carters from noted gunsmiths, saddlers, cutlers, fishing-tackle makers, waterproof patentees—to say nothing of fashionable tailors, hatters, and hosiers—all requesting their wares to be kept dry and delivered immediately to the cotton-spinner's son and heir—Magdalen felt that Stephen and Robert ought to be a little more forbearing.

To young men reared like the Cromers, with the notion of being the first in that part of the county, it was doubtless trying to see hats respectfully raised to the handsome Reresby, not only in the by-ways of their village, but the highways of Northampton, while *they* skulked by unnoticed. But as this arose from the natural progress of the times rather than from assumption on the part of the Mordaunts, it was not fair to visit their mortification upon *them*. She clothed her remonstrances, nevertheless, in the meekest language. But, whenever, either singly or together, her brothers were longer absent than usual from the Hall, the moments seemed to fall like droppings of molten lead; so persuaded was poor Magdalen that, sooner or later, these two violent young men would stimulate each other to some open demonstration of insolence

towards one who, much as he would doubtless bear for her sake, was not to be insulted with impunity. Sometimes, when follies and disgraceful connections of which she dreamed not, though within limit of the village, or some feigned errand, such as the pretence of wild-duck shooting at a farm possessed by their father on the confines of Huntingdonshire, detained them from home, nothing would drive from her mind but that the report raised by Ralph Drewe had reached their ears, and that they had pursued their inquiries at Deasmill till all had come to light! Already, perhaps, they had demanded explanation of Reresby! Already some hostile encounter might be arranged! Such were the ever-present anxieties of that gentle nature.

The suddenness of her brothers' arrival had forestalled those arrangements with Reresby, touching their future correspondence, which might have relieved her mind. Communication with *him*, either in person or by letter, was out of the question now that both were under the personal inquisition of their families; and never was fairy princess, however dragonishly guarded, more impossible of access than the Squire's daughter at the top of her dreary hill. A messenger could not have reached her nearer than the park-palings without detection.

It was only on the Sabbath—it was only when the two families, so unchristianly inimical, were gathered together under the roof of the house of God—that the conscience-stricken girl enjoyed the happiness of knowing that she breathed the same atmosphere with him to whom she had pledged her faith. Even then, the consciousness of her fault prevented her enjoying, as Reresby did, the momentary glance that, however blameful the impulse sanctioning its sacrilegious joy, satisfied him of the presence of her for whom he would have renounced his happiness in this world and inheritance in the next.

Meanwhile, the return of the Mordaunts to their charming home was as satisfactory as is usually the case where there exists no drawback on the conscience or the purse. Served by first-rate tradesmen and first-rate domestics, Mr. Mordaunt found his orders punctually obeyed during his absence. Though winter was come, the produce of spring and summer awaited his arrival. For the Christmas party about to assemble under his roof, the magic of wealth had worked its usual wonders. But, to the master's eyes, *this* was not the pleasantest aspect of Deasmarsh. It was not even the satisfactory report of his land-steward and bailiffs that caused so exulting an expression to glitter in the eye of the Man of Capital, when seated once more at the head of a board so differently served from that he had left behind. He was happy—*how* happy! In the course of the following week, the son whom he so loved,—the son who was likely to reflect such honour on the name he bore,—the son who, though he had taken first-class honours at the

University, was as little of a pedant as his plain-spoken father, was to assume his seat in Parliament, and with prospects that caused his excellent father's heart to sing for joy!

"I congratulate you, my dear boy!" said he, when the disappearance of Mrs. Mordaunt and her daughter after dinner, on the day of his arrival at home, left them to the discussion of an excellent bottle of claret, such as, out of compliment to the tastes or prejudices of his quondam partner, old Freshley, he had abjured for many weeks past, "I wish you a thousand times joy! After all, the little wife to whom I have been looking forward with such anxious feelings, turns out exactly what we could wish. Never did I see a more charming little girl."

Without a suspicion to what little wife, or what little girl, his father might be alluding poor Reresby, whose thoughts were dedicated to one who had the form of a grace, but the height and port of a muse, involuntarily glanced towards the silver claret pitcher; wishing, for once, that its opacity did not prevent his ascertaining to what amount the disappearance of the fragrant Château Latour that glowed within accounted for the strangeness of his companion. Mr. Mordaunt's wits seemed to have taken leave of him.

"Your mother and sister have always endeavoured to raise misgivings in my mind," continued the happy father, little dreaming to what conjectures he was giving rise. "They were afraid that, educated as she has been, she might turn trivial and vulgar, above all, self sufficient and overbearing. So far from which, I never saw a more humble-minded little creature. Instead of the heiress of hundreds and thousands, you might fancy her the parson's daughter of Deaswold!"

"Of whom are you talking, my dear father?" inquired Reresby, the imputation of vulgarity instantly bringing the Freshleys to his mind, and with them horrible surmises of the truth.

"Of the girl who will make you the happiest of men, and enable you to do credit to a position to the duties of which you are by anticipation devoting yourself!" said Mordaunt, again filling his own glass and that of his son. "By marrying Claudia Freshley, my dear boy, you will be able to start in London with an income of between five and six thousand a year. And, from all I have seen of the world, Reresby, I am compelled to admit that a man never takes a superior place in public life who is poorly off in private."

"Do you mean, sir," said Reresby, every vestige of colour suddenly forsaking his cheeks, "that, without the slightest warning, you have planned a marriage for me? that you have chosen a wife as you negotiated for my seat in parliament?"

"You speak, my boy, as if you almost fancied yourself ill used by having a hundred thousand pounds thrust into your pocket!" rejoined his father, a little astonished.

"Not *ill* used, but injudiciously used—if, as I almost fear, you have taken serious steps in this matter," replied Reresby, in a steady voice.

"I don't know what you mean by *serious* steps. Marriage-settlements cannot be executed without your signature. Nor can any one promise and vow in your name, as at your baptism, that you will love poor little Claudia for richer for poorer, for better for worse. But it is now more than three years since Freshley proposed the match to me, when I answered that if it could be brought about, it would have my warmest consent."—"If it could be brought about," added Reresby, in a less assured tone.

"And from that day to this," added his father, "I have looked forward with the most earnest desire to the accomplishment of our project."

"Three years!—yet till this day, to give me no intimation of your wishes! And I, who fancied that your whole heart was open to me!" exclaimed Reresby in a tone of deep emotion.

"The heart of one individual is never *wholly* opened to another; as no one, my dear son, knows better than yourself!" rejoined Mr. Mordaunt. "There is always some corner or another doubled down, for discretion's sake, or in *justice* to the claims of other people. The most confiding parent or candid friend has a right to choose for his disclosures the moment he believes to be most advantageous to the accomplishment of his wishes."

Young Mordaunt replied only by a groan.

"If I abstained from discussing this most eligible connection with you previous to your starting on your travels," resumed Mr. Mordaunt, "it was that you might view the world with an unshackled eye. I wished you to feel perfectly free. While you were away, I watched your letters with anxiety, to detect the slightest indication of a preference in the countries you were visiting; and your lively allusions to black, brown, and fair, afforded me a sufficient guarantee that you were heart-whole. On your return, I cross questioned you, and was still at ease. But, lest my wishes should mislead me, I even wrote to your friend, Sir Herbert Glynne, inquiring whether there were any drawback abroad to your forming a happy English marriage?"—"And even Glynne never let me into the secret!"

"No secret was confided to him. So much, in fact, was he deceived, that I am satisfied he fancied, on arriving here, that my matrimonial scheme referred to the little girl at the Rectory,—a match wholly unsuited to you in every respect."

"What led you to think so?"

"The interest with which he regarded her. It may not have occurred to *you*, who were indifferent on the subject. But I promise you that for many days after his arrival at Deasmarsh, he was perpetually watching Emma Cromer, to determine whether she were worthy of his friend."

"And why, oh! *why*, my dear father, did you not undeceive him and tell him the truth?" cried Reresby.

"Because we were still uncertain of Claudia. Your mother was anxious that nothing should be irrevocably decided till she was grown up, and we could be personally satisfied of her qualification to do honour to your name. But now that she finds her all we could wish,—pretty, good-humoured, devoid of pretension—"

"Yes, yes!—I see!—a Manchester Miss—with white teeth, rosy cheeks, and cherry-coloured ribands," cried young Mordaunt, impatiently shrugging his shoulders.

"You do not estimate at a *very* high rate, Reresby, the taste of your mother!"

"At all events, sir, I hope that, in the warmth of her enthusiasm for this Lancashire heiress, she may not have gone so far as to apprise *her* of your scheme?"

"When women get together, it is hard to say where their confidences begin and end," replied his father, a little relieved. "Claudia and Matilda appeared so perfectly to understand each other, that I conclude it was with the prospect of becoming sisters-in-law."

"How unfair, how unkind, to write with such apparent unconcern about this girl's beauty and improvement without giving me the smallest clue to—"

"Find no fault with your sister on that score, my dear boy!" interrupted Mr. Mordaunt. "It was by my express desire that no hint was afforded you. In affairs of the heart, I know the contrariety of human nature. Certain loves, like certain flowers, will not flourish under culture. If touched by the hand, they wither."

"Metaphors are deceitful arguments, my dear father," was the grave reply of poor Reresby. "The best way of dealing with rational beings is by appealing to their reason. Had I been acquainted with your wishes, I should have been on my guard against forming other attachments."

"You *have* formed other attachments, then?" demanded Mr. Mordaunt, with a sudden contraction of countenance.

"I have." "And it was perhaps on that account you objected to accompanying us into Lancashire?" "It was."

"The object of your attachment resides, then, in this neighbourhood?" continued Mr. Mordaunt. "I might have guessed it! All the vexations of my otherwise prosperous life, all the briers entangling my pleasant path, are fated to spring from the same hateful source!—those confounded, those contemptible Cromers!"

Reresby sat silenced. Intemperance of speech was a thing so unusual with his father, that he judged it better not to aggravate him by self-defence.

"A race of insignificant people," resumed the angry man,

"without energy to distinguish themselves from the clods from which they derive their subsistence! A race which has clung to the soil of Deaswold like the oak-apple to its oak, only to deteriorate the parent stock: poor, without talent or spirit to enrich themselves; obscure, without containing within themselves the germ of ennoblement; unable to advance either their own interest or those of their dependants; and still more incapable of extending their ideas or even their desires to the advancement of the country or amelioration of the human race!"

Still his son answered not a word. For some such expansion of indignation he was fully prepared.

"After all I have achieved for my children, I had surely a right to form ambitions for them!" resumed Mordaunt, as if reconcentrating his thoughts aloud. "Mine is not a fortune lazily transmitted from sire to son, by hands too inert to do more than clench their hereditary havings. *I have worked* for all I enjoy; worked with my hands, and worked with my head: been astir with the sun and wakeful in the watches of the night: which entitles me, I think, to exact something in exchange for the situation to which I elevate my successors. Yet your sister wantonly refuses the hand of a young man devotedly attached to her, the representative of one of the first houses in the county, and of high and unblemished character, simply because his way of entering a room and making a bow does not take her fancy!"

"Matilda, then, has again refused George Melfont?" inquired young Mordaunt.

"Again, and in terms so decided as to close the door against all renewal of his suit; nay, I fear, to cut short all further intimacy between the families."

"George Melfont is a worthy creature," said Reresby, glad to have attained a subject on which he had courage to open his lips, "but not exactly calculated to engage a woman's eye."

"Her eye?" cried Mr. Mordaunt, in a rage. "Where is the use of such an understanding as Matilda's, if her affections depend on mere extrinsic advantages? George Melfont is upright, honourable, well-affectioned. Independent of his noble position, he would have made her an excellent husband."

"Not if she could not bring herself to *like* him, my dear father!" argued Reresby, with firmness. "A romantic passion may not be indispensable to the happiness of married life. But repugnance is an insuperable obstacle. Be candid with yourself. Would the laborious life you have led have been supportable, had you not been married to a woman to whom you were fervently attached? Or, would your present state of prosperity possess half its charm, were it not shared by her with whom you have passed hand in hand through life, the object of your unshackled choice, and consequently of your continued love and veneration?"

"Do not cite your mother as an example, Reresby," said old Mordaunt, with deep feeling. "There is not such another woman in the world! To bring *her* name into question is profanation. Lay not your hand on the ark of the covenant!"

"Just so, would I fain speak to my own children of my wife!" cried his son, with equal enthusiasm; "which could never be the case, sir, were my domestic affections withered by an interested and distasteful marriage."

"And do you imagine, then, that, when the charm of youth and prettiness is gone, there will be anything in the little whiffling child-faced daughter of our good Rector, to excuse the want of fortune and want of consideration that will weigh down into nothingness the best years of your life, and perhaps induce you to look forward to my death as a term of enlargement?" cried Mr. Mordaunt, with a look of pity and disgust.

"The daughter of the *Rector*?" exclaimed Reresby, in his turn, in a tone of such unfeigned amazement that his father saw in a moment there was some misunderstanding between them.

"Why, did you not just now tell me that you were reluctant to accompany us into Lancashire, because the object of your preference resided hereabouts?"

Reresby was affirmatively silent.

"And to whom *but* Emma Cromer could you allude? I will not believe, Reresby, that you have derogated to some person of whom your education and habits of life render you the superior. You can scarcely have taken a fancy to one of those old Moulsey hags at Basinghill. And who else is there betwixt this and Northampton?"

To Mr. Mordaunt's great surprise, his son hesitated to reply.

"With the family at Cromer Hall, thanks be to heaven," said the old man fervently, "you have no acquaintance! For, sooner than see you united to the offspring of so much malignity, intolerance, meanness, and pride, as the Almighty hears and judges me, I would—"

"My dear, *dear* father," interrupted Reresby, rising and throwing his arms around his father, as he would have done in his boyish days, "spare me a hasty denunciation such as we could never recall! Be forbearing! Do not drive me to extremities? Fail not in your usual tender mercy, and I will never, dear father, *never* fail in my duty."

"It *is* then the daughter of the man who has spat upon your father, and endeavoured to trample your family into the dust, to whom you have attached yourself?" faltered Mordaunt, utterly overcome.

"It *is* the daughter of Mr. Cromer of Cromer Hall,—a being as different from her odious father as—"

Instead of proceeding, Reresby Mordaunt was forced to relin-

quish his hold upon *his*, whose struggles to release himself from his son's embrace had suddenly ceased, and snatch a glass of water from the table to hold to his lips. The strong man was reduced to the weakness of a woman. Tears glittered in his eyes. His pale lips quivered with emotion. With much difficulty he struggled with his feelings, so as to escape utter unconsciousness.

"Not another word to-night, dear sir, I beseech you!" said his son, who had never before seen him so deeply affected. "We are neither of us in a state for argument. Give me your hand, dearest father, as an assurance that you cherish no rancour against me."

Mr. Mordaunt silently extended his hand. It was plain that the anguish within was too bitter for words.

"And, in return, accept my promise," continued his son, pressing that venerated hand fondly between his own, "that I will take no step in this matter without previously consulting you. Nothing, sir, believe me, has occurred that ought to shake the confidence between us."

"Not when you placed in the hands of my only enemy a sword to drive into my heart?" faltered poor Mordaunt, still ghastly from the effects of the shock.

"As yet, not a single human being, excepting Magdalen and myself, is aware of what has passed. Old Cromer knows not so much as that we are acquainted."

"Then there is still hope!" was the secret ejaculation of the unhappy father. And he was no longer slow in placing his hand in that of Reresby, while acceding to his entreaties that all further discussion of the business should be deferred till to-morrow.

CHAPTER XIII.

Eftsoons, both flower and garland far away
 She flung, and her faire dewy locks yrent,
 To sorrow huge she turned her former play,
 And gamesome mirth to grievous detriment.—SPENSER.

THE morrow brought mutual explanations, which, if less stormy, were scarcely less unsatisfactory. After narrating his accidental introduction at the Rectory to Jacob Cromer's niece, it was difficult for Reresby to account for the rapid growth of intimacy between them without compromising, in the eyes of his father, the delicacy and discretion of her whom he was pledged to make his wife. As far as possible, he took upon himself the blame; spoke of his chance meetings with Magdalen in her daily walks, and even of his intrusions into the grounds at Cromer Hall. But of Deasmill he said not a word. Avowals which would probably have satisfied Mr. Mordaunt that the honour of his son was irrevocably pledged, were injudiciously withheld. In the conviction, therefore, that his son was touched only by the romance of the moment, and that a prepossession so rashly formed would be as

rapidly surmounted, the prudent father exacted that Reresby should grant a year's trial to the strength of attachment. "If at the expiration of a twelvemonth," said he, "you still assert a marriage with Mr. Cromer's daughter to be essential to your happiness, my consent, however reluctantly granted, shall not be wanting."

At a sentence so much more lenient than he had anticipated, the sanguine young man was beginning to expand into rapturous expressions of gratitude, when his father somewhat drily interrupted him.

"Do not thank me too soon!" said he. "My concession is not unconditional. Under any circumstances, my dear boy, you would have quitted Northamptonshire next week; having to show yourself at Castle Dangan, preparatory to taking your seat at the meeting of parliament. But, as matters stand, I shall require you to start for town to-morrow by the mail-train. Notwithstanding my causes of enmity against Mr. Cromer, I feel it my duty as a father to interdict all further intercourse between you and his daughter, till you are able to go straight to her parents, like an honest man, and ask them for her hand."

"All further intercourse. *even by letter?*"

"If you are wise, even by letter! For, should your clandestine correspondence fall into the hands of the family, so far from sanctioning the marriage they might exact as an *amende honorable*, I should absolutely refuse my consent. You will, therefore, I conclude, perceive the wisdom of forbearance."

In vain did Reresby attempt to plead the cause of Magdalen. For Mr. Cromer's daughter, Mordaunt found no pity in his heart.

"Don't talk to me about her delicacy of feeling!" cried he. "You have known each other, Reresby, but a couple of months. The whole affair is a romantic adventure, such as every now and then befalls every young man of your age who finds a pretty girl imprudent enough to listen to his addresses. No, no! Miss Cromer's affections *cannot* be *very* deeply engaged."

Reresby of course thought otherwise; and plausible enough were the arguments by which he strove to convince his father that she who had confided her happiness to his keeping, was a girl of no ordinary merit, of no common strength of mind.

"Let her prove it!" was Mr. Mordaunt's rejoinder. "I shall require some little evidence of the fact before I reward her with the hand of such a son as mine. If her love for him will not hold out against a year's absence—"

"And cessation of correspondence," interrupted Reresby in a low voice.

"—it is not worth the suing for!" added his father. "Meanwhile, she suffers no injury at your hands. The abrupt termination of your clandestine courtship is a benefit rather than otherwise; and as no one is aware that you are so much as acquainted, no slight will be thrown upon her by your departure."

"At all events, my dear father," said young Mordaunt with deep feeling, "promise me to respect her secret—even as regards her uncle—even as regards my mother."

"Even as regards your mother!" solemnly responded his father.

"And that, should chance throw you together, your manner towards Magdalen will denote no resentment of what has occurred."

And again, the prudent father satisfied him by complete acquiescence; after which, what more was to be urged?—what more to be argued? All that remained for the young man was to hasten his departure. Like a convict, he was perhaps in hopes of getting his period of punishment abridged by prompt submission and good conduct.

To convey furtively a letter of explanation to Magdalen, now that her brothers were at the Hall, and, like other idle country gentlemen, perpetually on the prowl, was out of the question. Even the one he intrusted to old Mrs. Clemson, to be delivered sooner or later as occasion presented itself, would perhaps never reach its destination! But to attempt more than this hazardous despatch had been an infringement of his compact with his father.

As young Mordaunt cantered along the valley dominated by Cromer Hall, on his way to the station the following day, never had that staring ungainly structure looked half so offensive in his eyes as now, when its mean self-sufficiency, the origin of all his woes, seemed to look down exultingly upon his departure!

So true, alas! to the grievous contrarieties of human fortune is the axiom of La Bruyère, that "the things of which we are most desirous never come to pass, or come to pass at a time and under circumstances that rob them of half their charm!" For Reresby Mordaunt, for whom everything connected with his entrance into Parliament had once assumed an all-absorbing interest, was literally proceeding to his borough with his pockets heavy with corruption to secure his return, and his heart heavier than his pockets.

On the other hand, upon hearing the railway shriek announce the departure of the train that conveyed him away, that of his father became inexpressibly lightened. To get him safe off was something; and though the contending passions of two young hearts were principles of action with which he felt himself incompetent to deal, Mr. Mordaunt was not the man to sit fretting over an evil not altogether hopeless.

His first care was to ask of the Freshleys the same concession he had required from his son—viz., a year's patience.

"It was desirable," he said, "that the tyro in parliamentary life should not have his time bespoken, in the onset of his public career, by those duties of domestic life, which he should think ill of Reresby if he did not for a time find all in all. A year hence, the new member would be at better leisure for a honeymoon."

And while eagerly awaiting a reply to the only Jesuitical epistle

he had ever indited in his life—a letter such as nothing but conviction that the well-being of his family was involved in the fruition of his plans, would have induced him to write—he took occasion to hint to Mrs Mordaunt and Matilda, as a first step towards still further estrangement from the Cromers, his desire that the closeness of their connection with the Rectory might be, in some degree, modified. For this apparent inconsistency of purpose, politics afforded a ready pretext. “The contentions of political life,” said he, “are likely to become of too stirring a nature for a Liberal like myself, and a Conservative like my good friend the parson, to meet over their wine without something as nearly amounting to a squabble as the colour of his cloth will admit. And now that Reresby’s doings are about to be added to my sayings, and that my son’s name will be seen daily in the list of those whom the worthy Jacob does not hesitate to treat of as enemies to Church and State, we are not likely to come to a better understanding.”

To fulfil the wishes of Mr. Mordaunt without offering offence to the man whose worthiness as a parish priest was as fully admitted by the family as though his politics had been less narrow and his connection with Cromer Hall less close, was not difficult. The Rector had always conditioned to be invited to Deasmarsh when the family was alone; and a large party was shortly afterwards to assemble under its hospitable roof precisely of the kind he was disposed to avoid.

A single Sabbath intervened, when Mr. Mordaunt, albeit usually a devout attendant at divine service, could not refrain from glancing across the chancel towards the pew occupied by the family of the lord of the manor, in order to form some estimate of the amount of his son’s danger, and of Magdalen Cromer’s charms. He even experienced something almost amounting to a quickened pulsation of heart, at the idea of being perhaps about to look face to face on his future daughter-in-law. But his emotions were thrown away. No Magdalen was there. Her father, in pursuance of his unbrotherly resentments, had hit upon what *he* considered the greatest insult in his power to offer to his brother, by transferring to the adjacent parish of Basinghill the seat of his devotion. Having issued a ukase commanding his sons and servants not to set foot in Deaswold Church again without his especial sanction, he profited by the permission often pressed upon him by the Miss Moulseys to take possession of the right wing of the long rambling pew railed and wainscoted with carved oak, in which the spinsters were accustomed to enjoy their weekly slumbers, and cultivate their annual lumbago.

When Mr. Mordaunt looked anxiously about him, therefore, at Deaswold, his expectations were frustrated. The Cromer Hall pew, above which, aforetime, the rosy faces of the little Cromers were seen to cluster like strawberries piled over a pottle, and which,

since the return of the family from Clifton, lacked the presence of the lovely girl whose mourning weeds were less black than the raven braids that enframed a brow as spotless as her broad-hemmed lawn, was as empty as a poor-box !

For poor Emma to have lost sight at once of the two objects dearest to her on earth—the fickle Romeo of Deasmarsh and the cousin Magdalen who was dearer still—was almost enough to refrigerate her devotions ! Even had her intended ostracism from Deasmarsh been whispered at that moment into her ear, she would scarcely have given it a thought.

Nothing more common in this world of grumbling and discontent than to hear people rail against the abuses of society or the dulness of daily life, without taking heed how much of the blame rests with themselves. What, for instance, would the squatters in the Prairies, repining after intercourse with their kind,—what would the wanderers in Australia,—what would the solitary English Rajah of Sarawak say to the unchristianly and unsocial feeling evinced by three opulent English families, like those of Deaswold, settled in a beautiful rural district, blessed with promising children and excellent health, who, instead of loving one another, each as himself,—instead of doing to each other each as he would be done by,—instead of intercommunicating with cheerful sociability for the general good,—abided in their several homes, sullen, alienated, and resentful ?

The traveller skimming that happy valley, and beholding the chimneys of Deasmarsh, Cromer Hall, and the Rectory, smoking above the trees, would scarcely have credited such inhospitable estrangement ; so pleasantly did the frame of the fair landscape appear to unite into one community the manorial proprietor, the wealthy trader, and the priest by whose instruction and guidance they were to find one common path through the cares and duties of this world to the frontier of a better land.

The disunion of the neighbourhood was, however, happily imperceptible to the gay party assembled by the Mordaunts for Christmas holidays. To the London guests, indeed, it was a relief to find the house unencumbered with country neighbours ; and even Sir John and Lady Mary Grovynor Grovynor, who, inhabiting the further extremity of the county, had a vague notion (such as it becomes a well-estated baronet and county member to derive from assiduous study of his county history) that the manor of Deaswold pertained to an ancient family of the name of Cromer, obtained for answer to their inquiries only that the present representative of the family led a life of complete seclusion ; and as, after the laudable custom of Deasmarsh, the party assembled on the Monday was to disperse on the Saturday following, in order that the Sabbath observances of the family might undergo no infringement, there was no chance of awkward questions concerning

the Rector and his daughter. The Grovynors, who, on becoming acquainted with the Mordaunt family at Lord Melfont's, had been so captivated by the open manners and clear-mindedness of the *notus homo* as instantly to invite him to Grovynor Chase, were enchanted, meanwhile, with all they heard and saw in his well-ordered domain. Practical people, and piquing themselves upon being, in the best sense of the word, "children of the century," instead of proving their affiliation by the adoption of a jargon, half-slang, half-foreign, and, like the serpent-charmers of the East, eliciting an evil spirit from things innocent and harmless, the baronet and his patrician dame occupied themselves in applying to the benefit of their property, and embellishment of their existence, every improvement and innovation of the day. Their only fault was, that they did their spiriting a little too fussily. Lady Mary was a dreadful "manager;" and her new systems worked as stiff at Grovynor Chase as the machinery of a new pantomime. Thanks to her anxiety to do things better and quicker by patent process than other people, to eat her strawberries a day earlier and her green peas a month later, to light the fire in her drawing-room by instantaneous-ignition-fuel, and communicate between the housekeeper's room and kitchen-garden by means of an electric telegraph, it was as dangerous to spend a few days at the Chase as to inaugurate a railroad.

The Settringhams, on the other hand, who, in the true spirit of their order, regarded the taste for patent improvements exhibited by Mordaunt as a disease peculiar to new people and manufacturers, were inexpressibly startled at finding a baronet of 1666 suffering from the infection; and it was as much as Sir William Settringham could do, when alone with Sir John Grovynor Grovynor, to abstain from asking him whether he had taken the malady naturally, or by inoculation. The old gentlemen had in fact scarcely felt the turrets of Settringham Abbey to be safe over his head, since he heard of the massive brass dogs at the Chase giving place to Arnott's stoves, and tons of Wenham Lake ice being deposited in a Great British ice-house; and it was something very like fear lest the contagion his nature had resisted from the cotton-spinner should be more readily communicated by a brother-baronet, which caused poor Sir William to fill his gloomy old mansion with Christmas visitors, as a pretext for not joining the more brilliant conclave at Deansmarsh. Guests, however, were not wanting; guests whose names the daily papers delight in printing in their columns, as interesting to the vulgar eye or embalmed in the public heart. The little group consisted of men of high personal distinction, connected with Mr. Mordaunt by the activities of public life or interests of commercial speculation; of whom chancellors of the exchequer seek audiences as often as they are solicited to grant them to other people.

"I wonder where the seven-leagued boots of this cotton-spinning rascal will stop!" exclaimed the Squire's younger son one evening, beside the meagre tea-table of Cromer Hall. "Hilshere, the turn-pike man, told me this morning that no fewer than seven carriages and four had passed through to Deasmarsh since Christmas-day!"

"Much good may they do the fellow!" was the surly rejoinder of the Squire. "I should be sorry to pay for the commons of such locusts. But new people are apt to think the company of fine folks cannot be bought too dear."

"It seems odd, however," observed the eldest son, "that, with such families as the Grovynor Grovynors, and Lord and Lady William Appreece, and the Solicitor-General, and Archdeacon Harris, and I know not who besides, staying at his father's house, the young Marquis of Flue (as Aristobulus Settringham calls young Mordaunt) should choose to be away from home."

"Considering 'tis the first Christmas he's been in England since Deasmarsh was finished, it is rather strange," rejoined his mother, not noticing that poor Magdalen was filling a cup of tea for her father out of the tea-urn instead of the tea-pot.

"You and Stephen give pretty plain proof that you never read the newspaper!" sneered the Squire, who seldom allowed the London papers to escape out of his study till they were a week old (as though the economy of dieting his family on stale bread had inspired him with a notion that anything but stale news must be wasteful). "As long ago as the Standard of Tuesday last," which was still safe under the mohair cushion of his library-chair, "you might have learned that young Mordaunt has just been pitchforked into Parliament."

"Into Parliament?—with scarcely a hair on his chin!" exclaimed the demure Mrs. Cromer, whose notions were grounded upon the gray-bearded representatives of her native county—the only members on whom her eyes had ever rested.

"Now-a-days, *young* members are the fashion!" retorted the Squire, with a still bitterer sneer, "as any one might guess by the measures they foist upon the country! Young England, as it calls itself, is pricking up its ears—and pretty long ones they are; and I suppose this young sprig of a cotton-spinner will soon be adding *his* hee-haw to the rest!"

"I thought I understood, sir, from my uncle Jacob, that Mr. Mordaunt's politics were liberal?" interposed Magdalen, who certainly understood nothing very clearly at that moment, so overjoyed was she at this explanation of an absence which, for a fortnight past, had not a little increased the redness of her eyes and the hollowness of her cheeks.

"*Radical*, you mean! Mordaunt would be a Chartist and Socialist, if it wasn't for the thousands he has managed to scrape together. Mordaunt is democratic to the backbone! But it does

not follow that the gosling should cackle in the same gamut as the gander. The Gazette announced him as returned for the borough of Castle Dangan, in that part of the united kingdom called Ireland. Now, as old Mordaunt has no connection of any sort or kind with Ireland," continued the Squire, as dictatorially as though he were not talking like an ignoramus, "depend upon it, the young gentleman has been smuggled into parliament by some of his college friends."

"Mordaunt lived entirely among the nobs when he was at Trinity," added Robert Cromer. "He had the name, at Cambridge, of being quite an out-and-outer!"

"And, ten to one, will think it a genteel thing to cut the old cotton-spinner's opinions, and maybe his acquaintance," chuckled the elder brother, to whom the handsome Keresby was an object of aversion.

"I could find it in my heart to forgive him *that*!" said the Squire. "A vote on the right side is never to be sneezed at."

"We shall soon see!" cried Bob. "Parliament meets on the 20th (doesn't it, sir), and the first political question will decide the thing."

"Why, as the youngest member of the House, he'll surely have to move the address?" said Stephen, doubtfully.

"No, he won't. It's only in the House of Lords the last peer that took his seat moves the address," replied Bob, with a knowing nod.

"Stuff and nonsense!" retorted Stephen.

"But I tell you it *is* so!" cried Bob, growing as scarlet as the coat, little dreamed of by the Squire, in which, despite his clerical prospects, he occasionally figured at Cambridge. "I've heard young Hogg say so scores of times; and *he's* a member's son, you know, and must be up to the thing."

"Young Hogg's a prime blockhead!" was the polite rejoinder of his brother. And the argument was forthwith pursued between them with a degree of noise and acrimony, under cover of which it was not difficult for Magdalen to steal out of the room, in a breathless search after Tuesday's Standard. So suddenly deprived of all intercourse with the object of her affection, so utterly ignorant of his projects and whereabouts, it was something to read his name in print, as returned for the borough of Castle Dangan! To *her*, those few words conveyed a certificate of his existence. To be returned to parliament sounded to the simple-minded Magdalen, at the top of the hill where she was stranded, like the ark on Ararat, out of reach of the striving tides of civilization, as if the man she loved were taken bodily by the hand and placed upon a bench in the House of Commons. He *must* be well—he *must* be thriving—since a discerning constituency had found means to convert him into an M.P.!

CHAPTER XIV

Ce n'est pas dans les momens d'énergie que l'on s'occupe des autres temps ou des autres hommes. On ne commande pas à ses idées, on ne veut pas réfléchir, on ne demande pas à son esprit d'approfondir une matière, de découvrir de choses cachées, de trouver ce qui n'a pas été dit. On *rêve*,—on ne médite point.—SENANCOURT.

HE *was* both well and thriving. Whether owing to the "nine times nine and one cheer more," with which, on occasion of his new honours, his health was drunk at his father's table, not only by his own family, but by the Grovynor Grovynors, the Solicitor-General, Lord and Lady William Apreece, and sundry other notabilities, and the triumph with which the same toast was echoed over its ale by the servants' hall; or whether to the contemptuous tone in which his entrance into parliament was discussed at Cromer Hall, at its next tea-drinking, by the Basinghill tabbies and the soured old bachelor ambitious to pass for an Excellency; certain it was, that never was Reresby Mordaunt in better case than when he entered the Travellers' Club, arm in arm with Sir Herbert Glynn, on the evening of the meeting of parliament, to preface his cigar with a sherry-cobbler. To a man under five-and-twenty, life can be readily made to assume a new aspect. As a child who hails as permanent every fitful gleam of sunshine brightening some dreary valley, every new object has interest in his eyes. He had been presented that morning to some dozen or so of desirable acquaintances. He had been claimed as an old acquaintance by as many more schoolfellows or college chums, desirous of ranking among his friends. But this was not all. The meeting of parliament had been brilliantly attended, not alone by the noble dames privileged by right of peerage to witness the delivery of the speech from the throne, but by a throng of fashionable beauties, eager, at that dead season of the year, to exhibit themselves wherever admiring eyes were gathered together.

Now, though Reresby had taken his share in balls, banquets, and midnight masquerades, both in Paris, Naples, and Vienna; though he had "swum in a gondola" on the Brenta, and serenaded under the balconies of Seville, it was the first time he had been present in a numerous assembly of his fair countrywomen of the patrician order. It was the first time he had ever seen the mantling bloom of English beauty, or the guileless expression of countenance (so remarkable in the daughters of Albion), attired in satin robes and diamond tiaras, and the modest dignity of deportment more distinguishing than either. And, though he might have disowned it, even to himself, his eyes were dazzled by the spectacle. The quiet self-consciousness of those beautiful women imposed

upon him. He beheld in them worthy partners for life for men whose deeds are heroic or whose deliberations are beneficial to mankind—the great men of the kingdom, whether in the field or cabinet. They were, in short, something above what he had yet connected in his dreams with the attributes of the sex. Though Magdalen might be equally fair, he could not picture to himself *one of them* meeting him among the nettles and alder-bushes of Deasmill!

As a tyro on entering a sculptor's studio, or even the workshop of some mechanical art, is apt to overrate the mere dexterity of experience, the usage of the world of a few high-bred women appeared to his unpractised eye a personal accomplishment. The youthful sovereign, in all the glory of her throne, and the beautiful marchioness and viscountess in waiting, impressed an indelible picture on his mind's eye. Statesmen and warriors exhibited their venerable heads in vain. All he remembered of the morning's pageant was effulgent with beauty.

"The Duke was looking very well—amazingly better than at the close of last session," observed Sir Herbert, who, though not in parliament, had been a spectator in the gallery. But, to his surprise, considering the interest he had often heard expressed by his friend in the well-being of the veteran of Waterloo, Reresby replied by an inquiry concerning a lady he had seen taken by his friend to her carriage.

"Who was that beautiful woman in the white velvet dress?"—was his not very apposite answer.

"One whom it is not good for little boys to be acquainted with," replied Sir Herbert, with a provoking smile.

"I was not aware of much difference of age between us," was Reresby's dry rejoinder.

"Oh! I am safe," rejoined the Baronet. "As her cousin, I have known her from childhood!"

"The better your right and title to present your friend," persisted Reresby, resolved not to be affronted.

"It is not right and title, but inclination that is wanting," replied Sir Herbert, as he took from the tray presented to them his goblet of sherry-cobbler and its glass tube, while Reresby primitively adhered to a straw. "Were you to ask me to step Dinneford's for a bottle of prussic acid, I should say you nay, precisely for the same reason that I refuse to introduce you to Lady Belvedere."

"It *was* then, as I surmised, the beautiful Lady Belvedere!" exclaimed Reresby; and, though his friend was now too busy with the pleasant absorption of his beverage to reply, silence implied assent.

"Reresby, my boy, you are in a fair way to lose your wits!" observed Sir Herbert, when, at length, after discussing their

several tumblers, they renewed their chat ; and the new member, as if to disguise his interest in Lady Belvedere, questioned his friend concerning " the beautiful woman in the sapphire brooch "—" the lovely girl with the white wreath "—" the pretty creature who had shaken hands with him in the lobby." " But don't fancy I am going to connive in making a Malvolio of you. ' Talkest thou of nothing but ladies ? ' "

" What else *should* I talk of, seeing that we spent the morning among them ? " retorted Mordaunt, smiling.

" Fetch me Dod's Parliamentary Companion and a pencil, and I fancy I can prove that some fifteen hundred of the male species were collected under the roof of the House of Lords ! That you did not perceive them, makes your danger only the more apparent. Seriously, my dear fellow," said he, lowering his voice, and speaking more gravely, " now I find that you have not, as you used to pretend, left your heart in the country, there is nothing I dread more than to see you caught up, as so many have been before you, by the sails of the windmill of fashion, and whirled out of all means of good to yourself or others."

" No fear ! " was the equally earnest reply of his friend. " To-day is a holiday, you know ; but, believe me, like the industrious apprentice, I have the best intentions of sticking to the shop ! "

" So has almost every man who takes his seat," rejoined Sir Herbert. " But upon *you* it is doubly incumbent. You have read up to your new duties : you have been talked up by your father. Instead of being crammed with Horace and Homer, *your* mind has been stored with all that has been said or written concerning prison discipline, pauperism, game-laws, and the various valves through which humane natures are just now emitting their philanthropy ; and your head and heart ought to be nerved for action, like those of a strong swimmer about to plunge into the waves."

" An indifferent swimmer, I fear—"

" An inexperienced, which comes to the same thing ; for inexperienced swimmers are easily discouraged. And when an enthusiast like yourself discovers how little can be done, and how slowly, in the matter of the great reforms which an enthusiast premeditates as to be accomplished like the light bringing *fiat lux* of the Creator, he is only too apt to throw up his vocation in disgust."

" What an oaf you seem to take me for ! " cried Reresby with some indignation. " Do you really fancy me so vain as to mistake the little pebble in my sling for some ' rock's vast weight,' manœuvred by an Ajax ? "

" Nothing of the kind, I assure you. All I fear is, that, once alive to the personal insignificance of every member of that potent body called parliament, which like a barrel of gunpowder is contemptible in particles and mighty only as a whole, you will allow

yourself to glide sullenly with the rest into the current of routine, perform your duties like an automaton ; and, living among parliamentary men, adopt their jargon, echo their cheers, reckon the sense of the country by the numbers of a division ; and because at some prating dinner-party you can prophesy to a vote the issue of the morrow's debate, fancy that you are doing your duty to yourself and your constituents."

"You expect, in short, that I shall sin by attempting too much, or too little, that I shall prove myself either a prig or a puppet ; whereas, my utmost pretension is to bring zeal and industry to the task of working out the reforms devised by the wisdom of more experienced and influential men. Some day or other you will see me one of the best committee-men in the House of Commons."

"Which need not, however, prevent your being one of its best speakers," rejoined Sir Herbert, a little appeased. "Our debating society, I remember, used to predict great things of you ; and Trinity was as proud of you as became its grey beard."

"If you had not ventured on a second cobbler, I am not sure that I should forgive your attempt to fool me to the top of my bent by these flatteries," retorted Reresby, shrugging his shoulders.

"To fool you ? Not I. I am as serious as the Court of Queen's Bench !" cried his friend. "But I don't want you to fool yourself. As one to whom much is given, from *you* much shall be required ! I pass over the question of talent ; I pass over the question of good intent. I will even suppose, my dear Reresby, for argument's sake, that all men who enter parliament enter it with similar qualifications. But your moral position is exceptional. You enter the House unshackled by antecedents, unshackled by pledges, unshackled by family connections, the worthless lumber of escutcheons, or the brand of the Herald's College ! You stand on your own ground ; *not* as a friend of the people (a cry good only for the hustings or to bamboozle hazy constituents at an election dinner), but as the friend of the country. Never was a man with hands and intellects more completely at his own disposal."

"And, better still," interrupted Reresby, "backed by the counsels of a practical man like my father, who has passed his latter years in collating the facts noted in his youth, and who knows by careful observation the condition of our manufacturing towns and prisons ; things which I conjoin together as cause and effect."

"And possessing these advantages," resumed Sir Herbert, "and being conscious of possessing them, admit that there would be no pardon for you if, for the sake of a few fantastic smiles and pleasant dinner parties, you allowed yourself to be caught in the web of an insect (*passer moi le mot*) like Lady Belvedere."

"Is it my weakness, pray, of which you are afraid,—or the strength of the lady ?" said Reresby, a little nettled.

"Of both. On your arrival in town, last spring, to meet me on

my return to England, you disdained all proposal of introductions; you would not hear of balls, you scarcely even allowed yourself an opera."

"But not, I assure you, because I fancied such pleasures likely to interfere with graver duties. On the contrary, I hold with the proverb that

"All work and no play
Makes Jock a dull boy."

"I suspect I understand your motives better than you understand them yourself," rejoined Sir Herbert with a smile. "Your praises of country duplicity, and outcry against the wretched artificiality of London women, betrayed you to be in love with some rustic Miss; nor, on visiting Dea marsh, and seeing the damsel in question, was I much surprised to find your passion-flower already out of bloom! Nothing, in fact, but the utter want of something to do, could excuse your having even fancied yourself into an attachment for the parson's daughter."

"As I live and breathe—" Reresby was earnestly beginning; but Sir Herbert did not choose to drop the thread of his discourse.

"But as even a paltry camphor-bag," continued he, "acquires value as a preservative from the plague, I would rather you retained the illusion, than that, finding yourself heart-whole, you turned your freedom to bad account."

"To prove to you that I am in no danger"—Reresby was again beginning, with the intention of confiding to his friend the secret of his engagement to Magdalen,—when the recollection of his solemn promise to his father stopped his mouth.

"To prove to you that my danger is not imminent," he again resumed "know that were you now to offer me an introduction to Lady Belvedere, I should play the Cæsar with you, and refuse the crown."

"Don't be afraid!" cried Sir Herbert, good-humouredly, as both took up their hats for departure. "If, within the next six weeks, I make you acquainted with anything younger or more dangerous than the parchment-checked beldames of Settringham Abbey and Melfont Park, to whom you were generous enough to procure me a presentation, I give you leave to elope with a *figurante*!"

"Pleasant prospects for my *début* in membership!" said Reresby, as he accompanied him down stairs. "The Emperors of China are required, on the day of their accession, to choose the block of marble that is to form their tomb. But hang me if I see why a new member is to have a parish pall thrown over his head, on the day of taking his seat!"

Sir Herbert, however, was not in the habit of "rising to explain." He had signified his intentions; and abided by them. By the time four-and-twenty hours had elapsed, however, the "hyperbolical fiend," which had caused poor Reresby to "talk of

nothing but ladies," relaxed its influence. The morning brought long and interesting letters from his father; the evening, an important debate arising out of the foreshowings of the address; and profound rumination succeeded to his idle aspirings. And very soon—sooner than was expected by either—the ex-parliamentary hours and habits of Sir Herbert began to modify their intimacy. When *one* wanted recreation, *the other* wanted rest. To dine, or walk, or ride together, was often impossible; till by degrees the baronet adhered to companions more at his disposal, leaving Reresby to pair off with the Eton chums who, like himself, constituted a part of the wisdom of the nation, from knowing when to cry "ay" or "no" at the instigation of his betters.

It is not with male as with female friendships. Men of the world come and go, and see much or little of each other as they list or as accident drives them, without explanation or apology. Neither one nor other of the twain who had mounted their camels side by side in the desert was, perhaps, aware of the branching in diverse directions of their several paths; till one Saturday night after the opera, when, as Sir Herbert Glynne, while lounging on the grand staircase near the crush-room door, with two or three other men, intent, like himself, on avoiding the *corré* of carriage-calling for neglected dowagers, he perceived that the happy man on whose arm the beautiful Lady Belvedere swept past them, ruffling her plumes in all the triumphant pride of conquest, was no other than his friend Reresby!

"Who the deuce has Lady Bel got hold of to-night?" inquired Colonel Bedingfield, a sallow guardsman, weasened with the hot rooms of twenty seasons, and living in the midst of temptations which his moderate fortune as a younger brother enabled him only to taste, as the children of the poor taste fruit—when green or mouldy.

"Some *nouveau débarqué*. I never saw him before!" replied Lord Richard Lovell, a cornet of the Blues, in the full bloom of a handsome face and fortune. "Probably some confounded foreigner."

"No, no! Lady Bel's French renders it desirable to steer clear of foreigners!" argued the sneering Colonel.

"I seem to know his face, surely it is Mordaunt of Trinity?" cried Mark Trevor, Lord Richard's Shadow, as far as the closest mimicry of dress and manner could secure the apehood; though heirship to a Yorkshire Squire and ten thousand a year might have fairly entitled him to invent waistcoats and slang for his own use. "Here, Glynne, my dear fellow! Glynne!"

But Glynne was leaning over the iron baluster of the staircase, overlooking the soldiers on guard, or the progress of the brilliant couple struggling through the crowd; while cries of "The Countess of Belvedere's carriage stops the way," encouraged them to what appeared to Reresby's inexperience a task as difficult as disgust-

ing. It was in vain that Trevor persisted in plucking him by the sleeve.

"Yes, it *is* Mordaunt!" continued the Shadow, after taking a survey through his own glass, in the same direction.

"And *who*, pray, is Mordaunt?" inquired the Colonel, with the supercilious self-possession of a man whom twenty years' experience of the *parade* of St. James's Street endows with the imaginary sovereignty of the place.

"A capital fellow,—we were with the same tutor at Eton," replied Trevor.

"But where does he come from?—To whom does he belong?"

"Nothing very particular, I fancy—from Lancashire,—manufacturing interest or something of that kind," said Trevor, with the cowed look of a man acknowledging a discreditable acquaintance.

"Mordaunt?—There was a man of that name returned the other day for some Irish borough," observed Lord Richard Lovell.

"*Ours*, for a thousand!—He was just the sort of fellow to get into parliament!" rejoined the Shadow. "Monstrous clever, a prime favourite with Keate.—Glynne!" cried he again, on perceiving that Sir Herbert was receding from his post of observation and buttoning his paletot to proceed downstairs, "*you* used to be Reresby Mordaunt's inseparable. Is it true that he is in parliament?"

"To judge from appearances, I should think he was in Lady Belvedere's carriage," replied Sir Herbert, fulfilling his intention of retreat. And as he leisurely crossed Pall Mall on his way to the Travellers', he found himself calculating the number of days that had elapsed since his last interview with Reresby, amounting to little more than a week! Even in the hotbed of London fashion (so prompt a ripener of intimacies) the sudden familiarity between his fair cousin and his dark friend seemed a little premature. For a moment he fancied that, as Reresby passed him on the stairs, a smile of triumph had brightened his face, purporting to say, "what you refused, I have accomplished; and no thanks to *you*!" But second thoughts satisfied him that his friend was superior to any such vulgar retaliation. Reresby had probably not so much as perceived him. The smile was only such as he had seen, twenty times before, on the faces of those intoxicated by the favour of Lady Belvidere.

"Poor moth! I must take care that he do not singe his wings past redemption!" mused Sir Herbert, as he made his way to the smoking-room. And before he had been many minutes immersed in the fumes of the sacred spot, Reresby was beside him; not waiting to be questioned concerning Lady Belvedere or making a mystery of the acquaintance, but meeting inquiry halfway.

"I sat next her at dinner, on Wednesday, at Lady Mary Grovynor Grovynor's," said he, "and, to my surprise, found her

perfectly *au fait* to my having been the *compagnon de voyage* of her loving cousin."

"Of course. At that time we corresponded."

"Which accounts for the number of old Naples stories to which she alluded, and for her begging me to come and see her the following day."

"And you went?"

"I left a card. It was not worth while to go in; Cad Rowlandson having fastened himself on my arm, who talks for two, and would have reduced me to a cipher. But on the strength of a very gracious bow to-night, I visited her opera-box, and was requested to stay and take her out."

"I could have sworn it!"

"My dear Glynne, you do me honour!"

"Less perhaps than you think for. You are just the novice for such a woman to seize upon as a spur!"

"A *spur*?—I was afraid you fancied me booked for a *bridle*!" cried Reresby, with a grimace at the vileness of his own pun.

"I mean that you are the very man for Lady Bel. to put forward with the hope of reanimating Fauconberg's drooping affections."

"Fauconberg?—a *beau ténébreux*,—dark, handsome and silent, whom I found sitting in her box to-night?"

"And who probably left it soon after you became the object of her coquetries?—Yes! Fauconberg is dark and handsome; and when harassed by Lady Bel.'s persecutions, silent. But he talks enough at the proper time and place."

"And what *is* his time and place?"—"Already a duel in view!"

"Pho, pho, pho!"

"His place is the House of Lords, and his time whenever a question of real moment is in debate."

"You don't mean to say," cried Reresby with sudden energy, "that *he* is the Lord Fauconberg who—"

"Precisely! The Lord Fauconberg who spoke so finely on the Irish Coercion Bill the other night."

"That heavy, supercilious-looking fellow! Who would have dreamed it!"

"You are still young enough, then, to expect pictures to correspond with the flowery descriptions contained in an auctioneer's catalogue?"

"I thought my own presentiments more to be trusted."

"No one's presentiments are to be trusted! If Fauconberg, for instance, ever heard of you before to-night, he probably expected to see a provincial swell, a man full of pretensions and *engorgé* with bank-notes. Whereas, if he had not thought you an individual worthy his best impertinence (which he seldom throws away on anything not a member of White's) he would have made himself less disagreeable."

Sir Herbert did not appear aware that his own address at that moment was to the last degree impertinent. Luckily, the conversation was interrupted by the cutting-in of Mr. Settringham, who after muzzing away the evening at the conversazione of some Hieroglyphic Association, valued only from adding its initials to his name, made his appearance so overbrimming with learning, as to require a whole decanter of iced water towards slaking the dryness of his dust.

CHAPTER XV.

O thou, the earthly author of my blood,
Whose youthful spirit, in me regenerate,
Doth with a twofold vigour lift me up
To reach at victory above my head,—
Grant proof unto my armour with thy prayers,
And with thy blessing steel my lance's point!

SHAKESPEARE.

Proud and happy, meanwhile, was the elder Mordaunt, in the conviction that his sapling was striking firm root in the ground. All was well with Deasmarsh. He had no fear for the future, and little regret for the past; so impossible did it appear to his sturdy nature and well-regulated mind but that the flighty prepossessions of his son must give way under the influence of the duties he was so earnestly embracing, and the valuable intimacies he was forming in town. Sir John Grovynor Grovynor had marked his respect for the benefactor of his county by introducing Reresby to the political leaders of his party; and each of the young man's succeeding letters brought accounts of pleasant dinner-parties, which had laid the foundation of others promising to be equally pleasant.

"He will do, my dear sir—he will do. Not a soul with whom he makes acquaintance but speaks well of him!" was his account of the new member to Jacob Cromer, as they ambled home together, side by side, one day from the Quarter Sessions. And Jacob, who had been receiving a hint that very morning (such as he received only too often) of the discreditable life led at Cambridge by his nephews, whom the penurious policy of the Squire had placed in one of the minor colleges to be out of the way of temptation, could scarcely repress a sigh while reflecting in how many ways the representatives of Deasmarsh had the advantage over the representatives of poor old Cromer Hall.

"And my boy Tom," added the exulting father, "whom I have scarcely seen this winter (for he has been spending his vacation at Bunt-mill with my friends the Freshleys), appears to have returned to college with fresh ardour—I am told by his tutor, to prepare for

Again the Rector breathed hard and looked sorrowful. It seemed almost like partiality in the dispensations of Providence! Here was this prosperous son of trade, whose daughter was wooed by the only son of the wealthiest nobleman in the shire, and whose sons remained steadfast in the sunshine of life; while at the Hall, the only surviving daughter was wasting to a shadow under the influence of some secret sorrow, and the sons prematurely disgraced by riot and intemperance. Even in his own peaceful rectory, the linnet once so cheerful in its nest was drooping, and had ceased to sing. It required the exercise of all the good Rector's humble piety not to feel that the new man was receiving a somewhat overcharged measure of the good things of this world.

"I never seemed to feel till *now*," observed Mordaunt, in the unconscious egotism of paternal satisfaction, "that there was worth or stability in prosperity. But I cannot deny that the accounts I receive on all sides of my sons *have* a little inflated my pride. I had no right to count on Reresby's turning out as he has done! To have *him* work out the mine over which I have been so long brooding, is a fiftyfold greater triumph than undertaking it myself. Reresby is young—Reresby is eloquent—Reresby is a child of the century—Reresby has enjoyed a very different education from what fell to *my* share; nay, a more complete one than is bestowed on one in a thousand of men of his own condition of life. And to look forward to his distinguishing himself in the accomplishment of measures, the carrying of which, even without his having a hand in the business, will go so far to smooth the pillow of one's deathbed, by feeling how much the condition of humanity has been improved in one's time—seems to put young blood into my veins!"

"I am accused, I fancy," silently mused the Rector (when the ruts and grips of a cross-road became fatal to the oratory of his companion), "of being sometimes tedious in the pulpit. But how often—how *very* often—does poor Mordaunt try my patience by his unreasonable panegyrics! One could almost think he had heard of Stephen's rustication!"

"Reresby is to make his maiden speech on Thursday se'nnight," resumed his companion, as soon as they got once more on level ground, "on Sir John Grovynor Grovynor's motion to inquire into the sanatory system of our penitentiaries."

"I fancied you were not anxious that he should speak this session?" observed Jacob.

"Far from it! But there is no standing out against the overtures he has received. The question was originally suggested, at Deasmarsh, to the consideration of Sir John; and he insists on being seconded by my son."

"In short, my dear sir, the question is your own property,"

observed the Rector; "to be argued with *your* arguments, and supported by data of your furnishing!"

"No, no! Hang it, let the young fellow enjoy the credit to which he is entitled!" cried Mordaunt. "As well say that the summing-up of a judge derives its merit from the testimony of the witnesses!"

"No fear but that Mr. Reresby will win golden opinions for himself!" replied the Rector, in a depressed voice. "He has too many advantages on his side for the world to deal with him churlishly."

A prophecy which, in the sequel, fully accredited the foresight of poor Jacob. The debut of the member for Castle Dangan in political life, was Io-pæaned by the press, as though a Daniel were come to judgment! A champion of the popular party, but standing in the House on independent grounds; a dispenser rather than a coveter of the good things of this world; what fear of the mustering of his partizans! So fond, moreover, is the London world of "sensations," that it would have been indignant had any one pretended to doubt the assertion of those irrefragable oracles, the newspapers, that a *rara avis* had broken its egg-shell.

"Remember, I was the first to prophesy that laurels were waiting for you, ready wreathed!" said the Countess of Belvedere, addressing him with her blandest of smiles from her carriage, which she stopped in Grosvenor Place for the purpose; "and you are bound to reward my foresight by fixing an early day to dine with me. Such of my friends as are aware of my happiness in being acquainted with the new Phoenix, are tormenting me for the favour of an introduction."

The smiles of the beautiful widow being as broad as her compliments, Reresby made an effort to look grateful.

"But there is another event," she resumed, "of which I am equally anxious to learn the date. When are you likely to speak again? Lord Fauconberg has set his heart upon being in the House!"

And *this* time there needed *no* effort to appear gratified. Reresby was fully aware that to the modern aspirant after celebrity it is scarcely less important to secure the penny-trumpet renown of the coteries, than the sackbuts and psalteries of the press; and that, as far as extended the hollow echoes of the clubs, the praise of Lord Fauconberg was fame.

"My ladyship waits for an answer," resumed the fair flatterer, perceiving that she had hit her mark.

"And my answer is," replied Mordaunt, "that I shall *never* speak again. Compliments from such a source have converted me at once into a 'Single-speech Mordaunt!' I consider myself a made man for at least half a dozen sessions."

"The fumes of the intoxicating draught of fame have not yet mounted into your head," rejoined Lady Belvedere with a smile. "But if you will dine with me on Saturday, we will fight out the argument of 'To speak or not to speak,' before an audience less impatient than my coachman and horses."

The proposition having been gratefully accepted, away went the barouche and its giddy occupant, laughing in her sleeve at having so easily found means to enliven with peacock's feathers the jack-daw's sober suit.

For Lady Belvedere, though—thanks to her personal charms and the independent position which enabled her to render her house in Belgrave Square one of the most agreeable resorts in town—she enjoyed the friendship or rather the intimacy of many of the most eminent men of the day, was so little worthy the distinction, as to regard the enlistment in her circle of the greatest spirits of the time, precisely in the same light as she would have regarded the acquisition of a costly piece of furniture, or a Paris pendule. Delighting in display, delighting in having it said that her house was one of the most charming in the world, she made little distinction between the novelties furnished by Howell and James, and the novelties furnished by the House of Commons. Even Lord Fauconberg was prized only because he was universally said to be "the most rising man of the day." Her beauty and rich jointure, however, bespoke forgiveness for her levity of character. The Countess was a person whom, enthroned by authority of the elective monarchy of fashion, it was essential to please. Aware that their tenure of her favour depended solely on her most capricious caprice, the brilliant birds of her aviary vied with each other in contending for preference by fluttering their gaudy wings, or tuning their garrulous throats; and the brocade and ormoluo of Belgravia for once acquired a charm beyond its superficial splendours, from the delusions of more than one gifted mind in mistaking for sunshine the glare of a solar lamp.

Nothing could be better founded than the anxiety entertained by Sir Herbert Glynn on seeing one so genuine as his friend Reresby about to enter the gardens of Arncliffe. Forewarned by early experience of the heartless vanity of his fair cousin, he could not bear to see, for the hundredth time, the lambent flame of wit converted into squibs and crackers; or a crystal stream diverted from every useful purpose, to become the ornamental fountain of her gay parterres. Aware, on the other hand, that he should meet with angry opposition from his friend to their growing intimacy, Reresby said not a word of his engagement in Belgrave Square; but, secretly convinced of Lady Belvedere's desire to become the Aspasia of the new Pericles, buckled on in self-defence an armour of philosophy calculated to defy her seductions. Prepared to find himself the centre of attraction to a brilliant party, and having

entered the gorgeous mansion of the Countess with an air of modest deprecation, he was a little surprised, perhaps a little indignant, at the well-bred coolness of his reception. Neither Park nor Tower guns were fired in his honour! Lady Belvedere, who was busily occupied with the ears of her Spitz dog, and the rich bracelets which, by caressing them, she was enabled to display, scarcely raised her eyes to his while receiving his salutations. The only persons present to witness his mortification were two very withered specimens of ancient history, who sat engulfed in two of the Countess's roomiest *fauteuils*, and whom, too new to London life to recognize as the oldest poet and most venerable historian extant, he conceived to be family connections; for nothing but prospects of inheritance he fancied could have recommended those bald heads to the favour of the fashionable widow. Before *such* uncles, however, he could readily believe that too warm a welcome to an N.N., like himself, might be imprudent. Long, however, before the party was completed by the arrival of the eight additional guests constituting the dozen to which the talk-loving Lady Belvedere limited her banquets, Reresby began to feel that he was a *very* small fraction of the whole. Instead of being invited, as announced to him, to dazzle the eyes of an admiring company, he saw that he was there on probation, to be as severely scrutinized and implacably judged as is usually the case where a youthful pretender is paraded in presence of the conscript fathers. "Instead of being all tongue, as they expect. I find I must be all ear!" was his judicious preparation for the ordeal. "Far better to be voted heavy than flippant!" and by studiously concluding the few observations he hazarded with a note of interrogation, and listening with an air of respectful edification to twaddle that would scarcely pass current in the dullest periodical going, he contrived, in the course of dinner, to vanquish the mistrust of the critical synod. Those who came prepared to talk him down, relented. The moment they saw him disposed to adopt their opinions, he was allowed to have one of his own.

The first he was induced to form, under these extenuating circumstances, was, that the charm of Lady Belvedere's clique was somewhat overrated. Her collection included, indeed, several very choice specimens of old china, and fine productions of the ancient masters. But, though the wit of the aged poet and political economy of the venerable politician were as racy in their way as wine of comet growth, Reresby could not help feeling that both were the high priests of an exploded creed; or casting repining glances at the corner of the table next the lovely hostess occupied by Lord Fauconberg, where easier and far pleasanter chat was carrying on.

The words of his rival, indeed, did not reach the ear of the tantalized Mordaunt. But by the rejoinders, which the shriller

voice of Lady Belvedere occasionally rendered audible, and still more by the eloquent expression of her intelligent countenance, he was enabled to judge of the playful and fluent brilliancy of their conversation. To be admitted as a third into their colloquy was the great object of his ambition. But he might as well have pretended to cap Turkish verses with the Sultan;—the intrusion of a stranger being the signal for self-dependent men, like Fauconberg, to “shut up shot.” Among the privileged, no one more unassuming. But even the homage of a man unknown to the world he lived in, endowed him with the hauteur of a grandee of Spain.

Had the demands on Reresby's attention made by the discussors of great questions around him, necessitated less than the utmost exercise of his faculties, the novice might naturally have wondered at finding Lord Fauconberg included in such a party of grey-beards; for how was he to surmise that these notabilities were merely dust thrown in the eyes of Lord Fauconberg's iron-minded father; who, but that he had the appearance of forming one of a political and literary junta, would have opposed an effective veto to his intimacy with the dangerous Lady Belvedere! For if unexceptionable in birth and fortune, the Countess was one whom it would have been difficult to tolerate as the wife of an idolized son. As often as it was said of her that she was beautiful as an angel, was it retorted by some bystander, “as a *fallen* angel.” Even the rare perfection of her personal charms was deteriorated, to an observant eye, by the haughty expression of her countenance. Her face was like some beautiful Italian flower-garden, overshadowed by pine-trees. Nor did the reputation of the fashionable widow inspire more confidence than her physiognomy. Like the defeatures produced on the seashore by successive tides that leave long ranges of entangled weeds and broken shells, her coquetries had too often risen to the mark of indiscretion not to have imprinted an injurious blemish. The infatuated few, who admitted her follies to be numberless, protested indeed that

Look in her face, and you forget them all:

while the indulgent *many* attributed the levity of her habits of life to the too early widowhood which had rendered her her own mistress, before the wilfulness of girlhood was past. That the liberty thus acquired was not distasteful was evident from the fact that, after twelve years' freedom, the Countess of Belvedere still retained her franchise of widowhood. It is true, her adventures in the interim might have filled volumes. But they had never been of a sufficiently glaring nature to endanger her place in society. Costly entertainments and considerable tact in the selection of the objects of her hospitality, assigned, on the contrary, the most brilliant *éclat* to her coterie; and while humbler sinners sank to the ground under the unsparing scorn of the Pharisees of London life,

Prelates and their wives, Chief Justices and their daughters, were scarcely less assiduous than the votaries of fashionable folly in paying their court in Belgrave Square. For *in* that court was included courtiership to personages far more influential than herself! The mansion of "Lady Bel." was a sort of House of Call for ministers. It was irresponsible,—it was neutral. Nothing in broadcloth and kerseymere to require explanations of defection, or remind people of broken pledges when the day of reckoning arrived. Honourable members of either House were there, to offer up their incense to the Muse or Grace (as Lady Belvedere's caprice of the day might be) who presided as divinity of the Temple; and if, while swinging their censers, conversions were effected or compromises undertaken which elsewhere had been rebuked by the forked tongue of irony, the event served only to assign new importance to the accredited head-quarters of intrigue.

"Strange," mused Reresby, on returning that night to his chambers in the Albany, "that, among these men, who pass for first-rate—men capable of connecting with the tribunal of posterity the immutable examples of the past—the most important questions of the day should be discussed in a tone more flighty than I yesterday heard indulged in by the frivolous circle of Lady William Apreece! Is there no such thing, then, in modern society as conscientious obligation? Is no one in earnest? Do people trifle with what involves the health, both moral and physical, of millions, only to tickle some fashionable Influence with the exquisite delight of a joke? God mend us! In my anxiety not to pass for a prig, let me beware of the contrary extreme! Glynne was right—*quite* right!—Lady Bel.'s set would fritter me at once into nothingness! I am not a Necker, with courage to wear my shoe-strings in defiance of a crowd of courtiers in diamond buckles. If I am to be anything in this world, or fulfil but *one* of the good purposes chalked out for me by my father—above all, if I hope ever to achieve an independent position for Magdalen and myself, let me eschew the seductions of Capua!"

A heavy sigh and prolonged reverie followed this involuntary reverting to the name of Magdalen! For if the charm of her beauty and artlessness remained strong as ever in his heart, the more largely he mixed with the world, the deeper and sadder his conviction that, the moment his engagement was completed, he must mix with it no more. The habits of Magdalen's education must estrange her irreconcilably from a sphere whose very dialect was an unknown tongue. What would she find to say in answer to the jargon of those with whom the dinners of the last two days had brought him acquainted, or how was her country simplicity to contend against the piquant grace of such a woman as the Countess of Belvedere; against the bons mots that sparkled from her lips; the prompt and decided opinions, announcing her mind

to be on most subjects made up; or the expressive smiles and vivid glances, imparting brilliancy to the one and vigour to the other; above all, the high-bred ease that prevented her judgment from appearing opinionated, or her eccentricities absurd? The retiring delicacy of Magdalen's manners and her submissive indecision of mind might render her, indeed, a pleasanter companion for the fireside. But, in the first bewilderment of personal distinction, poor Reresby was beginning to fancy a fireside the pleasing refuge of mediocrity, and to dream of a brighter world elsewhere. Had he found himself of decided consequence in Lady Belvedere's set, he might have adhered to his defiance of the wand of Circe. But he saw that he was held of small account, that he had a field to conquer; or rather that, to attain even moderate consideration, he must fight inch by inch over the ground. All this was a stimulant. Like Caius Marcius, he was not to be called "boy" with impunity.

"Before I make my final retreat," said he, after writing his acceptance of a second invitation to Belgrave Square, "I must teach these people that it is a proof of strength and not of weakness. They must learn to miss me. They must find out that the loss is not wholly on my side!"

CHAPTER XVI.

And at the last, a path of litle brede

I found, that greuly had not used to be;

For it forgrown was wyth gras and wede

That wel unnethes a wight might not see.—CHAUCER.

At Deaswold, meanwhile, the spring appeared to progress with a lagging pace, more especially at the Rectory. The wistful eyes of poor Emma peered out in dispirited weariness from her close sitting-room upon the dun and flowerless lawn; wondering whether the gay hepatics would *ever* brighten the dreary borders, or *when* the buds would begin to swell upon the green rods of the musk-rose branches ranging in unsightly disorder across the window. As yet, there was nothing to tempt the golden beaks of the blackbirds from their hiding-place. As yet, there was no pretext for so much as a weeding-boy to enliven the deserted place. The very evergreens drooped in sickly languor. No life—no hope in that gloomy little garden. It was not, however, ennui alone that weighed down the poor girl's heart. She was thinking, with as much philosophy as was compatible with her unsubtle nature, that, if Deaswold had become a more prosperous, it was a far less cheerful place than before the advent of the Mordaunts. As sunshine extinguishes the logs upon a blazing hearth, the glories of Deasmarsh had proved too much for the village. Cromer Hall was in the right! Her uncle, though he did not see far, saw clearly.

Deasmarsh was the sole origin of her estrangement from her cousin Magdalen; and but for occasional glimpses of the luxurious life of the Mordaunts, she should still look forward to a tea-drinking with the Miss Moulseys at Basinghill, as a first-rate entertainment; and, perhaps, but for Reresby's banterings, fancy Aristobulus Settringham the great man he fancied himself. All she had heard and seen and *felt* at Deasmarsh invalidated her apportioned enjoyments; but for which, there had been less occasion for such painful efforts at cheerfulness whenever her father, on entering the room, found her with one of her aching temples resting on her hand, instead of engaged in the tasks from which her happier girlhood derived both profit and pleasure. As the spring advanced, indeed, the good Rector put these exertions oftener to the proof, by inviting her, whenever a gleam of March sunshine seconded his wishes, to accompany him in his walks. By a thousand artifices of affection did the tender father endeavour to assign an interest to these homely expeditions. He could not take her to the Hall, indeed; for between him and his brother's family the distance was wider than ever. Nor would he escort her to Deasmarsh, for of its comforts and attractions he was beginning to fear that his poor little girl had seen but too much. But he contrived to pass through the village, and, as if unintentionally, place before her eyes the condition of many whose lot was wretched compared with her own, and who addressed themselves, notwithstanding, cheerfully and even enjoyingly to the duties of life. Or, pretending business in his vestry, he managed to guide her across the churchyard so near the tablet erected to the memory of her mother, as to justify an allusion to her memory—to her virtues—to her early death—and the consolation he had derived and still expected to derive from the affection of her surviving child.

It did not surprise the good man, after these indirect appeals to the better feelings of the poor girl who hung upon his arm, to find by a few convulsive sobs that, though silent, she was deeply moved. But he gained little from the tenderness roused by his lessons. Though, the next time they met at table, Emma exerted herself doubly to appear interested in the news of the day, as derived from the newspaper, or his morning's ride, she talked so much at random, made such miserable confusion of names, dates, and places, and, above all, exhibited so much paler a face than usual, and eyes so doubly heavy, that her father resolved to leave her for the future to herself. That he was himself the cause of her griefs, that the frankness with which he had disclosed the denunciations of Ralph Drewe had revealed to her susceptible feelings not alone that she had become an object of indifference to Reresby Mordaunt, but that he had bestowed his affections on another, was not likely to enter his head; and all he wanted was some motherly counsellor, some person of her own sex, to consult concerning the best mode

of restoring her spirits. But the neighbourhood afforded only Mrs. Mordaunt to whom he could appeal; and he had a repugnance to apply to Deasmarsh! To complain that Emma's life at the Rectory was a dull one—that, in consequence of a family dispute which deprived her of her cousin's society, she wanted companionship, would have sounded like a reproach for the diminution of their attentions. As remedies are often extracted from the bitterest herbs, a sneer from one of his female neighbours at length suggested what his own kindly nature had not afforded. Forced into conversation by the spinsters of Basinghill, by an encounter with their pony-chaise in a narrow lane, he could find no better answer to Miss Moulsey's rebukes concerning the length of time that had elapsed since he or his daughter visited the Manor, than to complain that Emma was poorly.

"How can you expect her to be otherwise," retorted the tart damsel, "so long as you keep her moped up at the Rectory? In my young days, my dear sir, the very word *ennui* was unknown! But now that schoolgirls and schoolboys are allowed to complain of being bored, Miss Emma probably finds her days longer than before you thought proper to quarrel with your brother's family, and before she got her head turned by the flighty ways of Deasmarsh Park."

Yes—the moral malady under which the poor girl was sinking *was* perhaps "*ennui*!" Too late now to consider whence the contagion was derived, or how it might have been avoided, the anxious father dwelt only upon the remedy to be applied. A total change of air and scene seemed indispensable; and, as a sister of his late wife, who was settled in one of the pleasantest suburbs of London, had more than once expressed a wish to become acquainted with her niece, he decided that a portion of his prudent economies could not be better applied than in a journey to town, where the advice of Lady Barton might possibly assist him in his projects for the future happiness of his child. Without a word of intimation to Emma, therefore, he completed the necessary preparations; nor, till he had received an acquiescent letter from his sister-in-law (the widow of a scientific professor, who resided in a villa at Kensington) did he fully communicate his plans. Even a journey to London, however, to which the repining girl had looked forward in former years as an impossible pleasure, failed to bring more than a passing gleam of colour to her cheek. Her father had been a little afraid of seeing her *too* overjoyed: but her utter listlessness on the occasion far exceeded his wish. It is true Lady Barton was to Emma only a scarcely-remembered aunt, and somewhat formal correspondent. But, if it were only change she wanted, or, according to Miss Moulsey's account, to escape the monotony of home, she might have shown a *little* more satisfaction at a scheme concocted only to afford her pleasure.

As a matter of form, it was decided between them that they must pay a P. P. C. visit at Deasmarsh. The Rector had business to intrust to his brother magistrate, and was desirous to recommend to his notice a young clergyman, named Milnward, who, during his absence, was to supply his place in the pulpit. And while occupied in these explanations in the study, Emma hastened to announce to Matilda and her mother her departure for town. "She was about to spend a month in London with her aunt Lady Barton."

So slight and uninteresting was her intercourse with this unknown aunt, that she had never happened to mention her name at Deasmarsh; and a month in London with a Lady Barton, so near the commencement of the fashionable season, sounded to Matilda as like an intimation that she was about to bring to a crisis her too-long suspended flirtation with Sir Herbert Glynn, as to the mother of Reresby (to whom the Deasmill episode of her son's life was still a mystery) a threat that she was bent upon completing in town the conquest which timely interference had been the means of frustrating at the Rectory. Although, therefore, on her entrance, both mother and daughter, on noticing the delicacy of her appearance, had experienced a momentary qualm of conscience concerning their previous neglect, their hearts hardened again on hearing of her approaching departure. While expressing ceremonious hopes that she might enjoy her visit to London, each would have given much to render it impossible; and their manner towards their young guest grew constrained almost to incivility; till, in Matilda, poor Emma discovered once more the cold reserved Miss Mordaunt of their first acquaintance; and in Matilda's mother, the "purse-proud" woman she had so often heard vituperated at the Hall.

It was a relief to all parties when the Rector arrived to claim his daughter, and they took leave together; and, while hazarding, as she quitted the room, a glance into the conservatory, the scene of her former or rather her *only* moments of youthful illusion, the brilliant bloom of the Persian lilacs and moss-rose trees which, at the same season only a year before, had struck her as so delightful and so beautiful, seemed to poor Emma to exhibit a sort of baleful charm! As soon would she have placed herself under a upas tree as sat listening again, in that specious spot, to the touching verses of Tennyson, recited by the treacherous voice of Reresby Mordaunt!

The train of reminiscences thus evoked subdued her spirits to even more than their usual despondency. Had her father, whose heart was warm with the hopes inspired by their forthcoming journey, caught sight of her face, he would have seen that it was pale as ashes; and that tears stood in the hazel eyes which used to glisten aforetime with such different feelings on entering the lodges of Deasmarsh!

It was a soft, balmy April day. The hedge-rows were fragrant with violets and gay with the white blossoms of the thorn; while the bright green grass afforded by its pleasant elasticity a still more grateful assurance of the earth's revival. To enjoy these welcome tokens of spring, the Rector proposed that, instead of taking the high road, they should skirt the river side as far as the extremity of the Park, and regain the village by the green lane dividing the Deasmarsh property from Cromer Hall. Lost in reflection—the father upon the duties he was to transmit to his delegate, and his daughter reverting in dreamy sadness to the days of dangerous joy, when she used to canter along that grassy level in company with Heresby and his sister, mounted on a beautiful black barb called Ayesha, broken for Miss Mordaunt's use—neither of them noticed, as they approached the bushy purlieus of Deasmill, an unusual stir in the air; till, on passing a stile leading from the park into the lane, a few yards from the paling of Clemson's premises, the jar of wrangling voices served to rouse them from their reverie.

"What is the matter? What can they be quarrelling about?" said Emma to her father, her curiosity *almost* excited by such unusual sounds of strife. On which the Rector, an habitual queller of discord, requesting her to await his return in the winding of the lane, proceeded straight to the mill for the purpose of ascertaining the matter in dispute.

It was a green and shady nook where Emma was left standing; in summer time, as completely overshadowed by the lofty trees skirting the lane as a linnet's nest in a hedge; but even now, so sheltered round by grassy embankments, and so fragrant with white and purple violets, that a more impatient person than the Rector's daughter might have been content to rest herself on the bank. And content for a time she was; but on finding that, even after her father, usually so authoritative among his parishioners, had entered the Clemsons' premises, the contending voices continued in dispute, and that many minutes elapsed without affording symptoms of his return, she proceeded leisurely towards the garden-gate, to inquire the cause of his delay. To her surprise, the group collected in front of old Clemson's house consisted of labourers belonging to the parish; most of them known to her by name. For, from their angry tones while addressing not only the inoffensive old dame but even their revered pastor, she had expected to find the place beset by trampers and vagrants; nor could she imagine the motive that actuated their squabble. The cause of Mrs. Clemson's indignation, indeed, was sufficiently manifest, in the injury which the intrusion of more than a dozen pair of hobnailed shoes had wrought in the flower-garden, the pride of her days, which her goodman had that very morning been hand-raking into the neatest order, after the spring sowing. But even this provocation was scarcely a sufficient justification of the acrimony with

which, disregarding the presence of the Rector, she was addressing the constable of Deaswold.

"I tell you there's no more grounds for saying 'twas found on *our* premises than Squire Mordaunt's or Squire Cromer's!" cried she; "and so I'm ready to swear on oath, afore e'er a justice of peace in the county!"

"No need at present of your oath, my good Mrs. Clemson," interposed the Rector. "At the proper time and place it will doubtless be required. All you are now asked to do is to allow—"

"No, no, indeed, sir—no, your reverence, I can't and I won't!" interrupted the poor dame, all but wringing her hands. "It has cut my heart to pieces only to look at it, sir. And if so be I'm to have it in my own sitting room, as sure as there's a judgment to come, I shouldn't never be able to bide in the place again!"

Laying his hand soothingly on her arm, the pastor proceeded to expostulate earnestly with his agitated parishioner; although in tones too low to reach his daughter's ear. But Emma's interest in the scene was by this time too strongly excited for forbearance; and while her father, having led the old woman towards her own threshold, stood too deeply engaged in remonstrance to take heed of what was going on at the gate, she slipped into the garden and reached the group of disputants. All gave way as she approached; for the Rector's daughter, young as she was, was both beloved and respected in the village. Even Ralph Drewe, the fellow by whose misrepresentations she had been made the object of such unjust aspersion at Cromer Hall, hung back as her light foot advanced along the gravel, so as to expose to her at a glance an object that lay there, as if deposited by the men collected around. A ghastly object!—the body of a dead child—an infant—swollen as by drowning, and placed upon a heap of sedges still wet and slippery from the stream! Impossible to describe the contrast afforded by its pallid immobility to the animated aspect of nature around! A sudden dizziness overcame the brain of poor Emma Cromer at a spectacle so undreamed of. Seizing the arm of the person nearest to her, she endeavoured to support herself while contemplating the face of the poor infant. But either some painful association connected with Deasmill, or the frightful word "child-murder," which was circulating from lip to lip, proved too much for her self-possession. For even before the constable could dart forward to direct his reverence's attention to his swooning daughter, the poor girl suddenly relaxed her grasp upon the sleeve to which she was clinging, and rolled senseless at his feet.

When her father, warned by the general outcry, proceeded to raise her tenderly from the ground, her face was lying within a few feet of the murdered babe; and as he bore her inanimate form into the house, which Mrs. Clemson had previously refused to open to the body that would necessitate the sitting of an inquest within her doors, the indignation with which all present had been upbraid-

ing the old lady's un-Samaritan-like hardness of heart, gave place to whispers of wonder, "not loud but deep," at the excess of emotion betrayed by the Rector's daughter.

"I s'pose, after all, it warn't *her*, then, eh, that I saw give the meeting to the young chap from Deasmarsh, here in Clemson's outbuildings?" chuckled Ralph Drewe, aside, to those of his fellow-workmen who were less favourably disposed towards the Rectory. "Ay, ay! Dame Clemson knows what she's about. 'Taint nothing new to *her* to have the young lady locked up in her parlour."

And by degrees the interest arising from the discovery of the murdered infant was effaced by curiosity arising from the hints of the informer. On the former point, they had heard everything related to the constable that was as yet known; how, in opening a water-course flowing from Squire Mordaunt's park, one of the drainers employed on the Deasmarah estate had found an obstacle imbedded in the clay of the river hard by Deasmill: which proved, on careful removal, to be the dead body of an infant, having a stone fastened with the fragment of a silk handkerchief to the neck. Immersed till the moment of removal in running water, no signs of decomposition appeared, by which inferences could be drawn concerning the time it had been in the water. But, now that exposure to the atmosphere was producing the usual results, there was every reason to suppose that the body had lain some weeks in the stream.

"Them as put it there knows best," said Ralph Drewe. "But I'll stake my week's wages that it was folks to whom the mill-works is better known than to e'er another soul in the village."

All this had been fully discussed previous to the arrival of the pastor; nor could the wisdom of the constable or gossip of any of the parties present supply rational grounds for surmises touching the origin of the poor babe so inhumanly dealt with. Medical aid had clearly not been afforded to the mother; and there was reason to infer that foul murder had been done. But none, not the slightest, for the discovery of the offender! Suspicion rested neither upon wife nor daughter of the village. Not that Deaswold, more especially since traversed by a railroad, could pretend to immaculate virtue. But, whether as magistrate or pastor, the rule of Jacob Cromer was so instinct with the mercies of primitive Christianity, that no misguided woman had need to stifle in the river the evidence of her frailty. Exhortation and remonstrance were afforded to lead sinners to repentance; but nothing was said or done, either in the pulpit or justice-room, to drive them to despair. Infanticide had consequently become an apocryphal crime in the annals of the parish; and the consternation excited by the sight of the dead babe lying livid before them upon the rushes, was all the stronger. Several of the labourers present declared that, if the act could be brought home to a daughter of their own, they would give her up at once to the gallows; and bitter and opprobrious names were be-

stowed upon the wretched woman who had found no pity for the cry of her new-born child. So loud was the cry for vengeance that, even when Mr. Cromer reappeared and issued instructions to the constable for the transfer of the body to the parish poor-house, to await the summoning of an inquest, it was with some difficulty he prevailed on the crowd to disperse. The dead infant was taken up, and enveloped in a cloth for removal; and still, idlers kept hanging about the premises.

Stimulated by Ralph Drewe's misrepresentations, they were resolved to see more of the state of the young lady's feelings who, when taken by surprise, had been so strangely overpowered; and though Emma was forced to accede to her father's desire that she would lie down for an hour or two, and remain safe under Mrs. Clemson's nursing, while he proceeded with the constable into the village to execute the necessary forms before returning to lend her his arm; and though, to persons of *their* class of life, the waste of a day is the loss of a loaf, even when, towards sunset, the pastor reappeared to claim his daughter, Ralph Drewe and one of his comrades were still loitering in the lane. Had it not been for the vexatious circumstances under which his brother the Squire had pointed out the fellow to his attention, Jacob was too much absorbed by the sad scene which had been passing under his eyes to take heed of his presence. But it was impossible for the maligner of his darling Emma to pass unnoticed; and never having happened to be brought face to face with him since his painful discussion with the Squire, the Rector could hardly refrain from shaking his staff menacingly at the fellow, whose skulking figure met his eye precisely in the ambush from whence he stated himself to have watched the meeting between Emma and the young heir of Deasmarsh Park. This momentary irritation, however, and even the indisposition of his beloved child, were overlooked in the unpleasant duties awaiting his arrival at the Rectory. His parishioners were now astir; all commenting, all exaggerating, all suggesting. The coroner had been sent for; and from house to house, throughout the village, went whispers of wonder and commiseration. Even had not the state of Emma's health necessitated the postponement of their journey, the conscientious Jacob would have felt it right, under such circumstances, to remain at his post. He would not have been satisfied to leave the case in the hands of so rigid and uncompromising a dispenser of the law as his brother magistrate at Deasmarsh. That which at present appeared a premeditated crime, might, he trusted, prove the result of ignorance and fear; the fear inducing some *very* young girl to conceal a birth and death, for the former of which alone she was accountable.

But it was in vain he endeavoured to suggest this probability to the good faith of others. The surgeon by whom the body of the child was examined, pronounced that it had not only been born alive, but had received after birth its natural nutriment; thereby

so exasperating public feeling against the unnatural mother who could have nursed and yet doomed it to death, that the benevolent Jacob could not help wishing the man of science a little less circumstantial in his testimony.

Bad enough to have a wanton and a murderess in his parish!—But to *his* feelings, the idea was scarcely less overwhelming of having to give up to capital punishment a woman to whom he had preached the gospel of peace. For prisons, condemned cells, the hangman and the halter, were not to him *mere* words, as to many who pronounced them. As a magistrate, he had considered it his duty to acquaint himself in detail with the ignominious paraphernalia of the worst rigour of the law; and scarcely a year had elapsed since, in company with Mr. Mordaunt, he visited a condemned prisoner at Northampton, and endeavoured to soften with words of grace the stubborn heart of a malefactor. All he could now do, however, after receiving from the coroner the verdict of “wilful murder” returned by the jury, was to pray inwardly and heartily that, since human justice must have its way, it might not fall upon persons too feeble or too hardened for human retribution to produce an example advantageous to the community at large.

CHAPTER XVII.

C'est un avantage pour la vie entière d'avoir été malheureux dans l'âge où la tête et le cœur commencent à vivre. C'est la leçon du sort! —Elle forme les hommes bons; elle étend les idées, et mûrit le cœur avant que la vieillesse les aie affaiblies.—OBERMANN.

SCENES and arguments such as these afforded sad preparation for poor Emma's journey to town! As soon as the inquest was over, and the Rector had seen consigned to the earth the body of the hapless child unentitled to the solemnization of the rites of the church, he was the first to hasten their departure; eager to escape all further discussion of an incident so unsatisfactory. Not a soul in the village but had already visited Deasmill, to survey the spot where the body was found; and the poorhouse, to examine the fragment of silk produced before the coroner, as having been tied round the throat of the child; and a warrant was in readiness in the hands of Mr. Mordaunt against the person or persons unknown, whom an active constable was intent upon bringing to light. *His* further aid, therefore, might be dispensed with in the business; and the absence of his daughter while such inquiries were pending being doubly desirable, the lapse of a few days saw them settled at Lady Barton's Villa. For Villa was the name which Mr. Cromer's prim sister-in-law chose to bestow upon an old-fashioned brick house in the High Street of Kensington, having in its rear a walled garden full of leaden figures and ever-greens that would have done honour to the *Borgerhout* at the Hague, from whence William of Orange imported the exact model

of the suburb that started into ugliness under his royal auspices westward of his English capital; and though as unsightly and uninteresting a residence as the stiffest and most angular boarding-school of that birch-consuming neighbourhood, poor Jacob hailed it as a happy exchange for the grass lawn and blackbirds of the Rectory.

Though his sister-in-law's taciturnity might have proved at any other time a little repellent, it was a comfort to his humane heart to feel secure against further questions concerning the finding and condition of "the body;" or being asked at all moments of the day by every soul, gentle or simple, with whom he came in contact, "what chance of detecting the murderers?" For Lady Barton was a cold, formal little woman, who, in the dispirited air of her pretty niece and the abstraction of her brother-in-law, saw only the gravity becoming his cloth; nay, had they visited her the preceding year, she would have been shocked at the levity of character apparent in both. For she was one of those who aptly illustrate the definition that "ceremony is a habit of the body invented to cover the deficiencies of the mind;" disguising her real insignificance under an almost Spanish dignity of reserve.

The husband whose knighthood had deceived the Mordaunts into supposing Lady Barton a denizen of May Fair, was in his time a painstaking *savant*; who, by the discovery of some very small planet or very useless gas, had made his way into a professor's chair, and entitled himself to be presented at a levee and converted into a Sir Nicholas; by which operation, both himself and his wife (or, as it better becomes us to call her, his lady,) fancied him endowed with all the consideration of a Sir Humphrey Davy. Her childless leisure thenceforward made a hobby of what she called his "European renown;" for, by means of those filaments and feelers which pretenders to scientific distinction manage to put forth, in foreign countries, the discoverer of what no one cared about, now it was discovered, had contrived to affix to his name the initials of certain continental orders of chivalry, almost as unknown to fame as the planet, or gas, or semi-metal he had dragged forth from obscurity. These insignia of knighthood looked well, however, on the title-pages of the pamphlets emitted ever and anon by the learned knight to keep the Royal Society and Philosophical Transactions in mind of him; and, better still, when appended to his name in the catalogue of the exhibition of the Royal Academy, which, season after season was sure to contain a portrait either in oils, chalk, miniature, marble, wax, cameo, or intaglio, of Professor Sir Nicholas Barton, K. L. M. N. O. P. Q., no matter what. The old house at Kensington still bore witness on its walls, as well as on slabs and brackets, and in every corner, how very plain and stupid-looking a man may become, by sufficient labour, the discoverer of planets and gases.

Still, however, his ambitious relict sunned herself in his slender

ray of glory; and on the strength of an overgrown mural tablet in Kensington Church, wherein the Barton arms were emblazoned in coloured marbles, and the number of the late Sir Nicholas's foreign knighthoods enumerated in all the letters of the alphabet, she invariably qualified herself as "the widow of the late celebrated Sir Nicholas Barton." To follow out the pretension, the little dry chip of a ladyship assumed a rigidity of deportment worthy of a ruff and farthingale. Had Sir Isaac Newton left a widow, she could not have been more primly self-conscious; and, as the world is easily imposed upon by gravity of mien, the annual conversazione at which "the accomplished widow of the late celebrated Sir Nicholas Barton" collected together the learned pundits, artists, and men of letters, with whom herself or the late celebrated Sir Nicholas had in the course of their vainglorious lives scraped acquaintance, almost rivalled those of Babbage, Murchison, or the Marquis of Northampton. In such an aunt, poor Emma soon saw that she must not look for the maternal friend, which, in spite of Lady Barton's ceremonious letters, she had almost expected to find in her mother's sister; and even the more sanguine Jacob satisfied himself, within the first few days, that there was as wide a difference between their natures as distance between Kensington and Deaswold.

On his venturing, during Emma's absence from the room, to advert to the nature of the painful incident which had retarded their journey to town, the widow of the late celebrated Sir Nicholas screwed up her mouth to dimensions that rendered the existence of the feature almost as problematical as that of the planet discovered by her learned husband; and, on expressing a hope that her niece had been kept in ignorance of a fact leading to such indelicate surmises, and learning how much poor Emma had suffered from becoming an accidental witness of the discovery, Lady Barton drew in the prudish skirts of her clothing, on her niece's re-entrance into the room; as though even her own high-dried immaculateness might suffer by contact with one whose eyes had been exposed to so contaminating a spectacle.

Her estimate of her country kinsfolk was, in fact, somewhat disparaging. Aware that the Rector's daughter depended on his prudence for her future provision, she had carefully eschewed acceptance of the often-proffered hospitality of Deaswold Rectory, lest it should be expected of her, in return, to divert any portion of her havings from the collateral heirs and namesakes of the late celebrated Sir Nicholas Barton. Still, though holding aloof from intimacy, she had mentally endowed the Cromers with a sort of legendary consequence, as belonging to an old Northamptonshire family, and holding a living adjoining the family estate which supplied her with such abundance of game. But now that, by catechizing her simple-hearted niece, she ascertained that they were not on visiting terms with Cromer Hall, and that their only

neighbours were a family of Lancashire cotton-spinners, of whom, from a certain choking in the throat whenever she attempted to utter their name, the poor girl spoke as slightly and succinctly as possible,—Lady Barton began to perceive that the sister who had been fifteen years in her grave, had made but a bad match for herself, and was much to be pitied, after all.

The sentiment, however, entitled her to exercise the most patronizing authority over her niece; and she no longer submitted to the simple way in which Emma wore her ringlets, or fashioned her dress. What could *she* know, poor girl, of the ways of the world; buried all her life in a country village, with no other model than a family of cotton-spinners!

It is true that, at the *conversazione* given as in honour of her country cousins, Emma saw nothing in the air of the female guests of Lady Barton to justify the severity of her fastidiousness: their costumes being “translated from the French,” with singular deviations from the text; while the organs of invention of Lady Madrepore and certain others of the bluest of blues, appeared to have been taxed, even to extravagance, for the creation of their costumes. Accustomed to the chaste simplicity of dress of her cousin Magdalen, or the costly elegance of Matilda Mordaunt, Emma could scarcely understand the monsterring of nothings perpetrated by the female moieties of the celebrities, gathered together by the widow of the late celebrated Sir Nicholas. She was, however, too completely out of spirits to enjoy the risible side of the affair. The few really eminent persons present commanded her respect: and though she wondered a little what could have brought them so far to converse together, when they might have confabulated so much more pleasantly in town, she was not the less grateful for her aunt for pointing out the president of such and such an association or academy, and principals of colleges without end. If the professors of poetry appeared sufficiently prosy, and certain distinguished romancers sadly inclining to the *pot au feu*, she made no avowal of her disappointment. So proud, however, was the relict of the celebrated Barton, of the learned literary and scientific congress she managed to assemble, that her displaced furniture was restored to its customary formality, and the smell of the lamp had evaporated from her dingy staircase, before she could divest her little person of the air of dignity with which it was invested by the mere duty of curtseying to such eminent personages. Nay, in the enthusiasm of the moment, fancying that, because R. A.’s had accepted her invitation, she must be a distinguished patroness of the arts, she proceeded to the extremity of hiring a glass coach, for the purpose of chaperoning her niece to the private view of the Royal Academy.

Unaware of being peculiarly blest in the privilege of entering those crowded rooms four-and-twenty hours before the price of twelpence enables every apprentice in London to enjoy the same

advantage, poor Emma gave herself up without reserve to the enjoyment of the pictures. And a great pleasure it was. Having never before surveyed a large collection of modern paintings, her untaught eye was more captivated by the brilliant colouring and *ad captandum* subjects before her, than by the dingy Hobbemas and gloomy Caraccis at Settringham Abbey. The *very* blue skies, *very* blue mountains, and *very* blue seas and rivers of the landscapes, delighted her unformed taste; and while examining the pink and white portraits of young ladies, with hair that looked like an advertisement of Willis's Mirific Balsam, and white satin whose gloss might have driven a dressmaker into hysterics, she could not conceive finer things of Raphael! And then, Landseer's colts were all but neighing; and there was a little pathetic episode by Frank Stone, that caused even episcopal eyes to glisten, and "drew iron tears down Pluto's cheek," in the shape of one of the bitterest Barons on the Bench, which made the catalogue tremble like an ague-fit in the hands of the tender-hearted Emma! So absorbed, in short, was the unsophisticated girl in the more striking features of the gallery, that the widow of the late celebrated might almost as well have been alone; and, but that her country cousin was entitled to go back to Deaswold and acquaint the cotton-spinners, her neighbours, of the privileges and immunities accorded to the memory of the late Sir Nicholas, which had enabled her privately to view the exhibition of the Royal Academy in company with some thousands of distinguished persons, Lady Barton would have regretted not having secured her usual companion, the portly relict of an Archdeacon residing in Trevor Square, also the widow of a "late celebrated;" a volume of occasional sermons, bearing his very reverend name, being asked for, once in five years, or so, at Hatchard's.

Reduced to the consolation of occasionally dropping a prim curtsy to some eminent individual, who acknowledged it by an equally ceremonious bow, and finding the study of the fashions for May on the persons of a few elegant women a pleasanter pastime than hazarding an attack of ophthalmia by fixing her eyes on the glare of the pictures, Lady Barton had been guilty of as many yawns as perhaps were ever produced by the occasional sermons of her friend the Archdeacon, when her ear was arrested by the silver but decided intonation of a voice that appeared to be laying down the law in an elaborate criticism of the exhibition. Unaccustomed, in a clique the prevailing colour of whose cloth was black, to find so much authority conceded to the weaker vessel as the ayes and other acquiescents of the interlocutors accorded to the lady in question, her surprise was at an end when, on turning round for a personal scrutiny of the parties, she beheld the beautiful woman, attired in the extreme of fashionable splendour, who was instructing a cabinet minister, a lord of the bedchamber, and two or three other men of less notoriety but more striking present-

ment, what they were to admire in the pictures, and what to make a bid for in the sculpture.

The Kensington lady decided that some very great personage was before her; too young, indeed, for one of the princesses of the blood; and, albeit her air was foreign, speaking English too well for an ambassadress. But the deference with which everybody made way for her approach proved her right, if short of divine, that is short of *royal*, to be highly patrician; and the "widow of the late celebrated" set her down as, at least, Mistress of the Robes! By the young man on whose arm she sometimes leaned, and into whose ear she sometimes whispered, but who was oftener despatched hither and thither, to ascertain the number of some picture before which a crowd was collected, and determine from the name of the artist in the catalogue whether it were worth getting elbowed to look at, her divinity, indeed, appeared to be fully admitted. Lady Barton, as she knit her narrow brows to gaze upon them, decided that she had never seen so handsome a couple; and, when another cabinet minister added himself to the group, and the courtliest of foreign diplomats set his *langue bien pendue* in motion to unite his compliments to her ladyship with his compliments to the exhibition, the little lady, who had shrunk in to almost nothing, could no longer refrain from joggling the elbow of her niece and directing her attention towards the strangers.

The artless face of Emma Cromer, flushed with excitement arising from the interesting picture she had been contemplating, proved apparently as striking to the fashionable Countess as her own Mechlin lace and tortoiseshell parasol to Lady Barton. But what was the amazement of the frigid aunt when, in addition to the looks of admiration lavished upon her niece by the Mistress of the Robes, the young man on whose arm she had been so familiarly leaning, hurried towards Emma with an extended hand, full of kindly recognition and friendly inquiries after her father.

Unversed in the proprieties of life, it did not occur to Emma, nor did her aunt's fidgety gestures avail to suggest, that it would be proper to present to her chaperon this familiar friend. She explained, indeed, that she was "on a visit to her aunt, Lady Barton;" but used the direct name, without the smallest allusion to the "late celebrated," and spoke of the neighbourhood of town without specifying her residence at Kensington; so that the sensitive old lady felt her dignity considerably impugned.

The undisguisable confusion of countenance exhibited by Reresby Mordaunt at an unexpected encounter with the cousin of Magdalen under circumstances so suspicious, being, however, naturally laid to her niece's account, long before the colloquy between Emma and young Mordaunt wore to end, Lady Barton had founded a romance à la *Calprenède*, in twelve volumes, upon their mutual embarrassment.

That the cavalier accompanying so influential a lady as the one

she had by this time heard addressed as "Lady Belvedere" could be little short of a lord, she nothing doubted; and what she had treated as listlessness or stupidity on the part of her niece might, after all, be the preoccupation of a tender attachment for some Lord Alfred or Lord Algernon! So handsome a young man, so graceful, so elegant, so high in worldly distinction, presented indeed a sufficient apology for the poor girl's infatuation! Lady Barton even stifled the reproofs she had been meditating, in the eagerness of her interest concerning the handsome stranger; and as Emma replied to her questioning simply that he was the son of one of their Northamptonshire neighbours (without allusion to cotton-spinning), who had lately distinguished himself in parliament, and further inquiry brought to light that he was the identical Mordaunt whom even the widow of the late celebrated Sir Nicholas Barton's beloved "Morning Herald" saluted with notes of admiration, she not only forgave his deficiency of peerage, but re-entered her glass coach (leaning on the arm of a meagre old footman, pepper and salt from the crown of his head to the gaiter of his shrunken shank) as proudly as though it were a coach and six!

CHAPTER XVIII.

Tell me, wherein have I offended you?
 Have I affected wealth or honour—speak?
 Are my chests fill'd up with extorted gold?
 Is my apparel sumptuous to behold?—
 Whom have I injur'd that ye seek my death?
 These hands are free from guiltless bloodshedding,
 This breast from harbouring foul deceitful thoughts.

SHAKSPEARE.

Was ever feather so lightly blown to and fro as this multitude!—

SHAKSPEARE.

No announcement of the Rector of Deaswold's sudden expedition to London (the first in her life even attempted by his daughter) having transpired in the village previous to the still more remarkable event which had struck dismay into the hearts of young and old, the journey was instantly attributed by those idle talkers who love nothing better than to misaccount for the movements and motives of their neighbours, to his reverence's desire to divert the young lady's attention from the sad sight she had witnessed, which was said to have excited such potent emotions in her mind.

"His reverence wishes, no doubt, to drive such a terrible story out of her young head," said the Deaswold blacksmith, in whose shop the question was discussed.

"But why more terrible to *her* than to other folks?" inquired a matter-of-fact farmer, who was waiting, beside the anvil, his turn to be served

"'Cause a young lady's feelings is finer and more delicate-like than the darters o' carters and ploughmen!" was the bitter retort of Ralph Drewe, by whom the subject had been broached. "And no doubt the young miss felt it the more from seeing the murdered babby laid out at Deasmill—a place as she's so fond of—and, as we all know, she's been 'customed to make a hiding-place!"

"What d'ye mean by hiding-place?" cried farmer Richards, turning roughly upon him.

"I mean what I say, and what I've seen, master Richards!" retorted the labourer—"and what 'tain't his reverence's fault that I didn't lose my work for saying stoutly that I *had* seen!"—

"And what was *that*, Ralph?" inquired the blacksmith, unwilling to discountenance either customer.

"The meeting behind backs at odd times o' young Master Mordaunt (as is gone to Lon'on to be parli'ment man) and the parson's young lady," persisted Ralph, unflinchingly; "which I saw with my eyes more times than one—and old Madam Clemson, for all her sanctified looks and mealy mouth, a-going between 'em to keep matters close."

"And when was this, Ralph?" inquired the blacksmith, applying his hammer ringingly to the iron, as though a bit of gossip inspired him with courage to work.

"Oh! times ago—a good sight afore Shrove Tuesday."

"And you said nought about it till now?"

"Didn't I though?—I up and told Squire Cromer, chapter and verse, straight an eend, afore the sun went down, the last time as ever I saw the young folks give each other the meeting at Deasmill."

"The Squire! *Why*, what had *he* to do with his finger in the pie! Why didn't you tell his reverence, when you were about telling?" observed the incredulous farmer.

"'Cause when even his brother repeated to him what I'd seen and said," cried Ralph, striking his stick angrily on the ground, "he gave no more belief to the story than if it had been told by crazy Hob."

"The more to his credit!" cried the farmer. "I am of *his* way of thinking. I can't abide eaves-droppers and tale-bearers. And if e'er a man in the land came a 'costing o' me with stories about *my* wenches, I'd make no more bones o' laying him on the flat of his back, than o' shootin' a rabbit!"

"And *that* maybe, you'd made bones on, if so be you wasn't a tenant o' Squire Mordaunt's, who's got never a gamekeeper on his estate!"—added the blacksmith.

"No, nor e'er a tenant as wouldn't give the coat off his back to serve him!" retorted the farmer,—"*which* is more than can be said by the gentry at the Abbey or the Squire at the Hall, or any other o' the grandees, who'd risk the life of a fellow-creatur to save that of a hen-pheasant."

"But if so be, Ralph, as you told, or *got* told to his reverence, how his young lady came courting unbeknownst to Deasmill," argued the blacksmith, partly to divert the farmer's attention from his clumsiness over his job—"how come it as he brought her, of his own accord and friendly-like, back to the Clemsons'; so as she fell in the way o' seeing the corpse?"

"That's more than I'll take on me to say!" said Ralph, doggedly. "I can only tell what happened—but not *why*'t happened. Only I've read in story-books and heerd tell, many's the time, that when folks have done aught that's amiss in a place, they've most times a nat'ral hankering to look at it again."

"Gammon, gammon, gammon!" cried the farmer, scornfully snapping his fingers. "There ben't a better nor a modester young lady than Miss Emma in the village of Deaswold, let t'other be who she may. And she chanced to call at the Mill, 'cause she was out a-walking with his reverence, like a good dutiful darter as she is; and they'd both been together at Deasmarsh, a-calling on Squire Mordaunt's family; 'cause there's nubboddy among all the gentry round but is proud to welcome 'em to their houses."

"Oh! there isn't, isn't there?" cried Ralph Drewe, wagging his head. "Well, that's news, somehow, I never expected to hear!"

"Why you're not going to pretend that his reverence an't the best o' friends with the Abbey folks, and the Deasmarsh folks, and the old frumps, man and woman, at Basinghill; and who else is there, pray, of gentry hereabouts?"

"*Who?* Why the parson's own brother, sure!" retorted the informer.

"And d'ye mean to say, Ralph, that his reverence isn't made welcome to Cromer Hall?" said the blacksmith, stopping short in his hammering.

"To the house of his father, and his father's father afore him!" emphatically added the farmer.

"And if he was, pray," was the roundabout answer, "why and wherefore should the Squire have out his old rips o' coach-horses, twice every Sabbath day, to carry the family to Basinghill Church, astead a' biding in his own parish?"

"That's true enow!" said the blacksmith, resuming his hammering.

"Bless ye! the brothers haven't exchanged so much as good-day sin' afore Lent!" pursued Ralph Drewe, pretending to whisper.

"That is, not since you kindled up unkindness atween 'em!" cried the stout-hearted farmer.

"At all events," added the bitter tongue, "you won't go to deny, I s'pose, the young Miss at the Rectory ben't thought fit company for the young Miss at the Hall? I'm ready to take my Bible oath, afore a magistrates' bench, that Squire Cromer said he'd lock up his daughter on bread and water, if ever he caught her exchanging so much as a word with her cousin!"

"Eaves-droppin' again, eh?" cried the farmer. "Amazing what wonderful things folks as is always a listenin' manages to hear!"

"It is a queerish story, though, neighbour, one must allow?" said the smith, turning up an inquiring eye at his customer, as he reached the last nail of the colt's last shoe, and a little surprised that Squire Mordaunt's tenant persisted in scouting the intelligence of a tale-bearer like Drewe.

On the other hand, all in the village were not equally mistrustful of Ralph's veracity. His statement concerning the clandestine meetings at Deasmill had long preceded the discovery of the murdered infant; and though there was no direct testimony connecting the two circumstances, the gossips of the village were not slow to ascribe the incidents affecting a spot so obscure to one and the same origin. Mrs. Clemson, as a person who kept aloof from those who considered themselves her equals, had always been an object of dislike; and now that she was accused of having administered to the frailties of her superiors, her neighbours set no bounds to their abuse.

"They saw *now* why she had discouraged their visits to Deasmill. Considering who frequented her house, no wonder she found her humble neighbours troublesome. Thank goodness, *they* had never been accused of harbouring young couples against the wish of their families, or suspected of aiding and abetting in putting an innocent babe out of the way."

For if, in cities, evil report find eagle pinions, how much more in an uneventful village, where it meets with no obstruction in its course, and is secure from the ameracements which wounded honour imposes on a class still subject to chivalrous forms of retribution! The old dames who sat before their spinning-wheels, lying away the good name of their pastor's child, considered indeed that they had received provocation to severity because a Deaswold girl, named Alice Hakewill, who had been seen loitering at nightfall ten days before the discovery of the drowned infant, in the neighbourhood of the mill-works, had been subjected, at the coroner's suggestion, to examination by the matron of the workhouse. Instead of rejoicing that, by this prompt measure, an innocent person was rescued from suspicion, they began by whispering, and finally declared outright, that "if greater folk than poor Alice had been dealt with as rigorously, murder might have come out. But 'twas only the children of the poor was open to suspicion: only the children of the poor was subjected to insult!"

At Deasmarsh, meanwhile, nothing transpired of this tale of village scandal. Mrs. Mordaunt was a woman too grave of deportment to encourage communicativeness on the part of her servants; and the mind of her husband was wholly and entirely engrossed by the brilliant career of his son. Scarcely a day but letters passed between him and Rereby. Gleanings from his own fertile fields of study were never wanting, to be tendered to one

whose garner could not be too full; and the cotton-spinner's daily *résumé* of argument in reply to the *résumé* of the debate of the preceding night contained in the "Times," was a masterpiece of political writing by which his son was not slow to profit.

Questions of profound national interest were in progress of discussion: and it was pleasanter to write of them to the candid and intelligent young man prepared to meet him, point to point, with the practised vigour of an athlete, than to potter them over with Sir William Settringham, or bear with the mysterious nods and significant smiles that implied the dissent of the consequential but empty Aristobulus.

That his worthy neighbour Jacob Cromer was absent from the country during discussions which could scarcely have failed to provoke misunderstanding between them, was highly satisfactory to Mordaunt; and as the zealous representative who replaced him at the Rectory, possessing the charm of novelty, contrived to draw larger congregations to Deaswold Church than had ever been collected there since the Mordaunts settled in the country, no one had cause to regret the sojourn of the Rector with the widow of "the late celebrated."

The Deasmarsh family did not, however, note with the less disgust the occasion taken by the Squire of Cromer Hall to demonstrate his enmity to his brother, by resuming his attendance at the parish church, the moment Jacob ceased to officiate and Mr. Milnward assumed his place. No Basinghill, so long as his brother and niece remained the guests of Lady Barton; and the "rips" of coach-horses had consequently reason to promise themselves a holiday, every Sabbath, throughout the merry month of May. But the calculation was premature. After establishing his little daughter under the care of her aunt, and seeing Emma resign herself cheerfully to the routine of the mildewed old mansion, the good Rector began to find the days hang heavy on his hands, which, at Deaswold, he was accustomed to fill up with works of duty and mercy. He hankered after home, and hungered after the cure of souls committed to his guardianship like sheep into the hand of the shepherd; and, with the view of passing among his flock a single Sunday of his six weeks' absence, set off by rail one pleasant Friday—(disastrous day for a journey!) for Deaswold. He arrived as safe, however, as though it had been Monday, or Tuesday, or any other day of the week: and pleasant was it to his cheery nature, after the dust and drought of a High Street and the Arabia Petræa of Lady Barton's high-walled garden, to inhale the fragrance of his own sweetbriars and honeysuckles, listen to his thrushes and blackbirds, and set foot on the elastic turf of his lawn. His favourite cows, on returning from the pastures, acknowledged by an affectionate low the well-known voice and touch of their master. His crop-eared terrier leaped to his very waist for joy at seeing him again; while the faces of his faithful servants expanded

for glee : the master so much more loved and respected than feared being dear to them as their flesh and blood. His young substitute, Mr. Milnward, on the other hand, had only satisfactory accounts to render. All had prospered. They had obtained no further clue to the perpetrators of the dreadful deed which had disgraced the village ; but at least it was not followed up by further transgressions.

It struck the good pastor with some little surprise, indeed, that, when he made his appearance in the village the following day, his parishioners seemed to fly before his face. It could scarcely be fancy : for at that season of the year and time of day the cottage-doors were invariably open, and the greater portion of the occupations of their inmates transacted in the air. But scarcely had he turned the corner by the churchyard-stile, when the women retreated from their washing-tubs, and the men from their working-benches ; and as he passed the smithy, the blacksmith contrived to be so busy at his forge as to avoid all need for salutation. Even the children stared in his face with more of curiosity and less of reverence than their wont.

"I begin to perceive the truth of the adage," mused the parson, good-humouredly, "that the absent are always in the wrong! Our London trip may do something towards restoring my little girl's roses and cheerfulness ; but it seems to have a trifle impaired my infallibility in my vatican of Deaswold."

A bitter thought at that moment traversed his mind, that his brother was perhaps the origin of his decline of popularity ! But Jacob was not the man to cherish bitter thoughts. He would not think so ill of the Squire. He would not think so ill of his father's son. Moreover, the ingratitude of the vulgar is proverbial. Let the hand that gives them bread be but a single day withdrawn, and it will become as the hand of the stranger.

On the morrow, however, when officiating in his sacred vocation, he *was* a little struck by the slenderness of his congregation. More than half the pews, habitually crowded, stood empty ! Of the vacancy of the chancel-pew belonging to the Hall he took no heed ; unaware that, during his absence, his brother's family had re-transferred their devotions from Basinghill to their own parish. But Farmer Richards and his wife and children, who were as constant in their attendance at church as the parish clerk, were wanting ; though only the preceding night he had bidden them good evening from the Rectory gate, so as to be certain that it was not indisposition kept them away. And twenty others—twenty of his most respected parishioners—were equally to seek.

The leaven of human vanity, scantily as it prevailed in his nature, suggested that the congregation had probably fallen off during young Milnward's administration ; and that his flock did not on this occasion expect the Rector to officiate in person. But, as they were walking home after church, the young man, by way

of mitigating the mortification apparent in the countenance of the pastor, indiscreetly attributed the empty pews to which Jacob had been preaching to the heat of the weather. "Last Sunday, sir," said he, "the morning was cloudy. But had the same crowd which *then* attended morning service been present to-day, the heat of the church would have been overpowering!" But Jacob was not deceived. His was not a congregation of fine ladies. Swooning was by no means a favourite recreation at Deaswold. Throughout the dog-days his church was more crowded than at Christmas! No! some moral mischief must be in progress.

According to his custom, he retired into his study for rest and refreshment between the two services; and, while communing with himself in the stillness of his chamber, the idea that, during his absence, his brother might have been stirring up strife against him, recurred with such force to his mind as completely to unhinge him. His was not a heart to bear up against the conviction of personal unkindness. Moreover, the cause of dissension betwixt himself and the Squire was of so delicate and cutting a nature, that only to revert to it brought a gush of tears from his eyes. When, therefore, he issued forth again from the Rectory, for evening service, the least observant person might have noted that his eyelids were swollen; and in addressing the "dearly beloved brethren," who were now diminished to so scanty a flock that they might have been numbered, one by one, his voice faltered so manifestly that, at the close of the first portion of the duty, young Milnward caused the clerk to hand him a slip of paper, hastily inscribed with pencil, proposing to read the sermon; the heat of the weather being apparently too much for the Rector. The hint sufficed to recall poor Jacob to himself. The hint sufficed to remind him that, in the house of God, he must not suffer his mind to stray to the things of this world; and overmastering, by a strong effort of conscience, his painful emotions, he not only declined assistance, but preached with a degree of energy and unction, of which, till that day, he had never yet given proof. The Mordaunts listened with surprise and edification. They had always respected him as a worthy man. They had never before given him credit as an eloquent divine. It might be that the discovery evoked certain qualms of conscience. For, suffering his family to return home alone, Mr. Mordaunt loitered in the churchyard till Jacob and young Milnward emerged from the vestry-door; and, though too cognizant of the pastor's resolution against dining out of his own doors on the sabbath-day to invite him to join their party at Deasmarsh, he did his utmost to persuade him to defer his morrow's journey, and become their guest. But poor Jacob had little inducement just then to prolong his sojourn at home.

"I promised Lady Barton and my daughter," said he, "to be

back by to-morrow morning; and they have made engagements, in consequence, that will hurry me away."

"At all events, you will not go by the early train?" inquired Mordaunt. "I have half-a-dozen things of more or less consequence to talk to you about."

Vaguely conjecturing that among these half-dozen topics might be one connected with the singular ungraciousness testified towards him by his parishioners, the Rector readily undertook to postpone his departure till the afternoon. Before they took leave of each other at the churchyard turnstile, he had promised to breakfast at Deasmarsh.

Little did he surmise, good, honest man, that these things to be talked about "of more or less consequence" related solely to Mordaunt's son, and the public questions to which Mordaunt's son was bound hand and foot, at that moment, as stringently as Ixion to his wheel! With the inadvertent selfishness of the prosperous, his neighbour, the cotton-spinner, saw in him only a man who was come from the great Babylon where his son was achieving distinction by advocacy of the cause of the many against the iron hand of the few; and hungered and thirsted after the crumbs of praise which, in London, the Rector of Deaswold might possibly have picked up from the tables of greater men!

Mrs. Mordaunt and her daughter inquired, with well-assumed interest, whether Emma were "very gay in London?" to which he frankly answered, "Gayer, poor child, than she had ever been in her life, and a great favourite with Lady Barton!"

And when Mrs. Mordaunt added (prepared, perhaps, for an evasive answer), "Of course she has met with my son?" he replied with unsuspecting candour that "Mr. Reresby Mordaunt was at the exhibition of the Royal Academy with his daughter and her aunt the very day before he left town."

Had Matilda found courage to question the simple-minded pastor concerning Sir Herbert Glynn, she would probably have received an answer equally voracious and equally unsatisfactory. But, as they had now breakfasted, and Jacob announced himself to have business at home preparatory to his departure for town, the master of the house proposed accompanying him back across the park. "The shortest way, papa, is by Deasmill," observed Matilda. "Quite as easy to cross by the East Lodge!" added Mrs. Mordaunt. "It seems an absurd prejudice, but, since that unfortunate event, I feel as great a horror of approaching Deasmill as the people hereabouts, whom Mrs. Clemson tells me she can hardly get near her to supply her with the necessaries of life."

Instead of answering, Mr. Mordaunt rose abruptly from table; but not before Jacob Cromer noted to his surprise a gesture of reproof escape him, as if to silence his wife. He was evidently distressed by the allusion to Deasmill and the "unfortunate

event;" or rather, evidently expected that his guest would find it distressing.

The Rector, the least mysterious of God's creatures, was beginning to feel grievously puzzled by these unaccountable mysteries. Though previously of opinion that, in the course of his acquaintance with Deasmarsh, he had heard almost enough of the merits and abilities of the son and heir, it was absolutely a relief to him when, as they took their way together across the thymy herbage of the park, to the discomfiture of the beautiful flock of merinoes which the utilitarian cotton-spinner had chosen to substitute for deer—instead of commencing the communication of a disagreeable nature, whatever it might be, which Jacob was vaguely anticipating—Mordaunt suddenly burst forth into a new eulogium of the member for Castle Dangan!

"I am told," said he, "that the effect of his maiden speech was electric—that it has made a wonderful sensation! And I promise you, my dear friend, that an effective speech in parliament is twice the thing it used to be. Formerly, a man spoke only as the organ of his party—and parties consisted of the ins and outs. Now, an administration is composed of half a dozen factions, and the opposition of a dozen: and every man is expected to deliver his peculiar opinion, even at the risk of creating a thirteenth. A logical summing-up of precedents is no longer accepted by way of argument; for, as we live in times that have no precedent in history, we must fain trust to instinct for our guidance."

"Or rather to the one unerring code of right and wrong!" added the Rector, as became his cloth.

But Mordaunt was not thinking just then of right and wrong. He was thinking only of his son.

"I am not an ambitious man," added he, "though I won't assert as roundly that I am not a proud one, when justifiable cause for pride presents itself. And I must say 'tis a thing to make a father hold up his head a little higher than usual when, in days like these—in days when the breakers ahead are so strong that even experienced pilots look pale—a young man like Reresby Mordaunt rushes to the helm and effects what the son of Lord Melfont, with his first-rate education, and four centuries of nobility to bolster his consequence in the eyes of the nation, might as well attempt as to jump over Plinlimmon!—I say again, that I really think I may be excused for declaring I would not exchange my son for any other young man of his years in the three kingdoms!"

The Rector replied, though in a dispirited tone of voice, nearly in the terms expected of him. But of so vainglorious a companion, stalking across his beautiful park with the sunshine of prosperity gilding every feature, how was he afterwards to inquire whether he could resolve him why the old women of Deaswold crept away into their homesteads at his approach?

As they drew near Deasmill, however (for, in a truly conjugal

spirit, the moment Mrs. Mordaunt suggested it as a place to be avoided, her husband scorned to take any other road), the Rector, though he appeared to be lending an attentive ear to the holdings-forth of his neighbour upon Protection and Free trade, became so lost in reminiscences of the fatal spectacle which had grieved his heart at his last visit to the place, as unconsciously to lower his voice to a whisper, in delivering the monosyllables for which Mordaunt occasionally paused, as even a painstaking horse relaxes his speed for the stimulant of his master's voice. He spoke faintly, and his face was as ghastly as his voice was faltering. No person who met them by the way could have surmised that their discussion was merely of a political nature.

"Good bye, then, my dear Cromer!" said the cotton-spinner, when at length they reached the opening to the lane; "since I cannot persuade you to give us a whole day, good bye! Let me hope that all I have been saying has produced some effect on your mind, and that when you see my young vagabond in town, you will impress on *him* the solemn lesson I have endeavoured to make clear to yourself."

And having heartily shaken hands with him, Mordaunt turned his steps towards home. But poor Jacob, overcome by awful thoughts till his blood curdled in his veins, felt so unequal to proceed, that for a moment he leaned heavily for support against Clemson's palings; even at that moment of self-absorption it struck him as a remarkable coincidence that, on raising his eyes, preparatory to proceeding on his road, they fell upon the hateful face of Ralph Drewe, who had been an unseen spectator of his parting with the master of Deasmarsh.

CHAPTER XIX.

How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame,
Which, like a canker in the fragrant rose,
Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name!—SHAKESPEARE.

"But you should have told me, my dear! You should have fully explained the circumstances and pretensions of the family at Deasmarsh Park!" remonstrated Lady Barton, in alluding, during her brother-in-law's absence, to their encounter with Reresby Mordaunt.

"I mentioned to you, dear aunt, if you remember," pleaded Emma, "that there was a family from whom I had received much kindness, residing within a mile of the Rectory."

"Yes; but you spoke of them as people who had made their fortune in business—just as *I* should describe the retired haberdasher who lodges opposite! You ought to have explained their immense wealth (in these times wealth is consequence)! Above all, you should have stated that the son was in parliament."

"I fancied that you must have noticed his name in the debates."

"Of course. Who has *not*? But how could I know it to be that of your country neighbour? And now, when your father meets the family in Northamptonshire, and they naturally speak of their son as having been present at my conversazione, what will they think on learning that he was not even invited?"

"If you knew Reresby Mordaunt as well as I do, my dear aunt, you would feel how much he would be out of place in a party of elderly people," was Emma's over-candid reply.

"Elderly people, child! You surely do not expect personages of extraordinary celebrity to be boys and girls!" exclaimed her indignant aunt. "However, it is not yet too late. I shall give another party for the express purpose of inviting him. Nay, I am half inclined to make it a dinner-party—a *snug* little dinner!"

On which announcement, Emma, who, having some experience of the snug dinners of the widow of the "late celebrated," was able to contrast them with the noble hospitality of Deasmarsh, could hardly refrain from a shudder.

"It is for *your* sake, my dear, that I am inclined to take so much trouble," resumed Lady Barton, self-complacently. "A young man like Mr. Mordaunt is, under certain circumstances, a most desirable acquaintance."

"Not for *me*, dear aunt!" replied Emma, hastily. "There are reasons which—that is—I have reason to be certain that—that Mr. Reresby Mordaunt has no desire for further intimacy."

"Ay, ay! Exactly what all young ladies of your age say, or are bound to say on such occasions. You did not wish me, if you remember, to invite your friend Mr. Settringham to my party."

"Only from his being so excessively tiresome."

"Yet you saw how eagerly he accepted the invitation!" continued Lady Barton, disregarding her. "He came, I noticed, among the first, and stayed till the last."

"Yes! because Mr. Settringham is accustomed to—" Emma was all but betrayed into saying "stupid parties." But it was not difficult to modify the phrase into "the society of learned people."

"As a country neighbour of Mr. Mordaunt's," added Lady Barton, "it might be as well, perhaps, to invite *him* to our dinner; for, not being a marrying man, it would take off any particularity in the invitation to your young friend."

"But, my dear, dear aunt," pleaded Emma, warming with the annoyance of having the fickle Reresby singled out for attentions purporting to bring them together, "believe me, *one* is as little a marrying man as the other; that, if you are planning a match for me with either, you might as well invite Mohun Lal or any of your oriental protégés for the same purpose!"

Lady Barton's dry face relaxed into a demure smile. She resolved, however, to take no further steps in the business till her

brother-in-law's return from Deaswold. And when, accordingly, poor Jacob made his appearance, harassed by the perplexities of home, and overcome by the fatigue of his journey, ere he had time to brush the stain of travel from his coat or wash the dust from his mouth, his anxious hostess closeted him in the stuffy little room she called the "boodere," to direct his attention, by mysterious hints, to the broken spirits of his daughter, preparatory to the disclosure of her projects.

"I am convinced there is something seriously the matter with the poor girl!" said she. "At her age, my dear sir, it is not natural for a young person to be so indifferent to the pastimes of life. On Saturday, my poor niece declined accompanying me to a charming and most edifying lecture on Catoptrics and Dioptrics at the Royal Institution, on pretence of disliking a crowd. And yesterday, after church, when Sir Grimwood Hopkinson, the learned Egyptian traveller, who lived five-and twenty years in a cave (like St. John at Patmos), deciphering hieroglyphics, brought here the famous Bavarian Professor of Chemistry, Manixellius; and, as there happened to be several eminent persons (as usual, on Sunday mornings) calling upon me, they sat for several hours discussing the transactions of the last meeting of the African Society—instead, I say, of evincing interest in so exciting a discussion, Emma remained pale and cheerless in a corner, as though she were going to faint!"

"The heat of the day, probably," pleaded the Rector. "But may I ask, my dear madam, what you infer from all this?"

"That the dear child has something on her mind; that she had formed some unfortunate attachment before she quitted Northamptonshire."

"I trust in Providence *not!*" replied Jacob, fervently; for, in the course of his hurried and heated journey Londonward, his thoughts had reverted from the strange conduct of his parishioners to the still stranger accusations of his brother which had produced such complete estrangement between them, till his mind was distracted by painful surmises.

"So thoroughly am I convinced of it," persisted the prim aunt, overstepping even her convictions in the desire to honour the roof of the late celebrated with a snug little dinner-party, comprehending a meteoric member of parliament and the eldest son of an ancient baronet, "that I am bent upon inviting to dinner the object of her mysterious attachment."

"You know him then? Emma has *admitted* that her affections are engaged?" said the Rector, his voice faltering from the conviction that his daughter had attached herself where hope there was none.

"She has said only so much in contradiction as maiden modesty required," simpered Lady Barton. "And, though I do not pretend to be of a romantic turn (which would be highly unbecoming the

widow of a man devoted, like the late eminent Sir Nicholas Barton, to the cultivation of the physical sciences), there is so much that is recommendable, in a worldly point of view, in a match with this youthful Canning, as to justify any encouragement and assistance my niece's well-wishers are able to afford."

"Not for worlds, my dear, good sister-in-law!" exclaimed the distressed father, vainly endeavouring to regain his natural voice.

"Forgive me for entreating you to do what the over-eager promptings of good-will too often render difficult—namely, let well alone! Trust me, these young people would have found means of meeting before this, had the wish been mutual. And I ought to be thankful to the Almighty that it is not; my neighbour at Deasmarsh having, long ago, apprised me of his intention to establish his son brilliantly in life, by a marriage with the opulent daughter of his former partner."

"Ay, *long ago*, perhaps," persisted the officious lady, to whom a project of any kind afforded a novel excitement. "But now that the young man has distinguished himself in public life, the Man of Capital will grow more ambitious. He will want countenance—he will want connection; and between the heiress of a brother cotton-spinner, and the daughter of an ancient Northamptonshire family (niece of the late celebrated Sir Nicholas Barton), will hardly, I should imagine, hesitate!"

"Hardly, indeed!" reiterated Jacob, shaking his head. "But it would be a painful thing to me, my dear madam, considering the close intimacy and neighbourhood in which we live, to put his firmness to the proof. I must, therefore, earnestly entreat that you will attempt nothing further to bring the young people together."

Inexperienced in supplication, the Rector spoke more peremptorily than he was aware of; and unluckily the woman whose life was so uneventful instantly chose to convert her niece into a victim of parental injustice. "But for the false pride of her brother-in-law, the poor child might make an excellent match!"

And from the day this crotchet entered her head, by incessant hints and mysterious allusions to a subject so painful to one of the parties, and so alarming to the other, she contrived to render them both thoroughly uneasy.

Meanwhile, the individual who had reduced to gravity the laughing countenance of Emma Cromer, and was causing to her fond father such bitter moments of care,—to say nothing of her heartaches of his creation in Northamptonshire and elsewhere,—was as little mindful of his conquests as the greatest of the Cæsars. The stronger ambition of public distinction had fixed its hold upon his mind: and womankind—tell it not in Gath—appeared almost as great an obstacle to his projects as the heavy baggage of an army.

Sir Herbert Glynne, who stood watching him afar off, no longer with anxiety but regret, as a philosopher notes the transformations

of some beautiful insect, could not refrain sometimes, at odd moments, from soliloquizing over the moral decadence of his friend.

"After all," muttered he, "I'm afraid a roc's egg is easier to find than a fellow of *really* liberal opinions! So long as men have their Greek and Roman history by heart, and a tendency to verse-making at the nib of their pen, amazing in what magnanimities they indulge! But if laurel-wreaths were devised to hide the bald head of a victorious emperor, they have done far severer duty in fostering the sprouting of ass's ears! What a fine fellow was Reresby at Eton! what a fine fellow when we used to cleave the blue waters together every morning, towards Mitylene, before we started for the East! What a second-sight of glorious emotions and achievements revealed itself to his nature! And to have subsided already into a mere lord-hunting, lady-rhyming young man about town! I have seen him dance attendance, side by side with that cornet-à-piston Lord Richard Lovell, upon Lady Bel.; who hesitated to *which* to give her arm, just as she might puzzle herself to which of her footmen to intrust her lapdog!

"But why feel surprised at *his* sinking into pigmyhood," he would continue, "after seeing even his parents, even that robust-minded old father and seemingly upright mother, truckle to ennobled lumps of clay like the Mellonts, and fancy themselves doing enough for their daughter by buying her way into the peerage! Alack for human nature! Let our missionary societies expend millions in putting down idolatry in the East, and destroying among the Hottentots the worship of Mumbo-Jumbo! But between idolatry of the golden calf on the part of great people, and adoration of great people among the children of Mammon, hang me if the first and second commandment be not oftener broken in the west end of London than on the banks of either Ganges or Gambia!"

Sir Herbert's disgust at the subservience of his friend in Belgrave Square was, however, accidentally modified. Overtaken one day in Kensington Gardens by the curiosity-monger, Lady Madrepore, he found himself inextricably seized upon as an auditor, till the nearest gate afforded opportunity for escape.

"Admit, my dear Sir Herbert," cried she, the moment she brought herself abreast of the panting fugitive, "admit that, after all, I was right! The papyrus your friend Mr. Mordaunt was good enough to bring me from Dendera—"

"Which he bought at a curiosity-shop in Compton Street, in order to preserve his own collection from pillage—" mentally added Sir Herbert.

"Does contain," resumed the museum-loving lady, "an account of the expedition into Persia of Rameses the Great, vulgarly known in history by the name of Sesostris! Such was the opinion of Champollion, by whom the papyrus in question was examined before it left Egypt; and such the opinion of Klaproth and Kosegar-

ten. And though Satorlini, Rosellini, and Nestor L'Hôte had their doubts on the subject, what were they, after all, but mere theorists, by the side of the great Champollion?"

"Too bad of Mordaunt," mused Sir Herbert, laughing in his sleeve. "to have hoaxed this foolish woman at the expense of men so eminent!"

"But my misgivings are now cleared up," added Lady Madrepore, with an air of gratified conviction. "Professor Slidderbottom of New York (a neophyte of the remarkable school founded by Gliddon), who is now actually on his way to Berlin to consult Dr. Lepsius and one of the most learned Egyptologists of the day, has seen my papyrus and confirmed the judgment of Champollion! I am at this moment on my way back from Kensington, where I have been to thank my friend Lady Barton (widow of the late celebrated Sir Nicholas), by whose kindness Professor Slidderbottom was brought to my soirée."

"A favour to be truly thankful for!" replied Sir Herbert with a smile which the impetuous rarity-monger did not accept as ironical.

"A most worthy person is Lady Barton," resumed the talkative lady. "I am indebted to her for several of my best autographs: one, from the great Linnæus to Professor Snitzenheim of Heidelberg, enclosing a rare specimen of the Icelandic flea; and another from the renowned John Tradescant, of which the ink is so pale that you cannot decipher a syllable except by chemical process."

"A valuable document, certainly. If all Lady Barton's treasures be equally available—"

"You would speak of them with more deference, perhaps," interrupted his companion, "had you seen the charming girl, who, in addition to Professor Slidderbottom, accompanied her to my *alla podrida*. But perhaps you know Lady Barton's niece, for there seems to be a vast intimacy between her and your handsome friend young Mordaunt!"

"Indeed? I understood from public report, which is good enough to trouble itself occasionally with his affairs, that his chief intimacy with the frailer sex was in the person of my cousin Lady Belvedere?"

"*Was* and *is* are two different tenses!" rejoined Lady Madrepore.

"At this season of the year, you know (as my friend little Hayward says), intimacies melt like ices. *A la fin, tout casse, tout passe, et tout lasse!*"

"And how long, pray, have things been 'broken' between Lady Bel. and the honourable Member for Castle Dangan?"

"Broken? Oh! pray don't quote *me* as your authority. I am not aware of having said anything of the kind. But certainly dear Lady Bel. did seem a *little* surprised that an insignificant girl like Miss Cromer should engross so much of her *preux chevalier's* attention the other night at my house; where they sat talking

together in a window-seat the whole time the New Zealand chiefs were chanting their hymn!"

"Flat blasphemy!" exclaimed Sir Herbert.

"And she was so urgent last night when I mentioned (as we were coming away from Lady Drax's concert), that I was to call at Kensington to-day about my papyrus, that I should drop in at Belgrave Square on my return and give her the particulars of my visit, that I can't help fancying the fair widow is the least in the world jealous."

"Lord Fauconberg's Madonna Laura *jealous* of a country Miss?"

"My dear, dear Sir Herbert! in what hermitage have you been hiding your head for the last fortnight, not to know that Lord Fauconberg is going to be married to a lump of virgin gold—a Welch heiress, with a slate quarry, and the mountain where all the famous mutton comes from, for her dowry? Twelve thousand a year—and not an idea in the world!"

"An heiress and a simpleton! I wonder whether there are more of them where she grew?"

"*Entre nous*," continued Lady Madrepore, "the world *does* say that Fauconberg took umbrage at the favour with which the new member was received in Belgrave Square; but that, instead of mourning in black and white, he wisely adopted hymen's saffron robe."

"Why, surely no one, even in this wonderfully clever century, was ass enough to conceive that a man so prudent in his generation as Fauconberg looked for anything in Belgrave Square beyond an excellent *restaurant*, with a handsome *dame de comptoir*?"

"Oh! fie, fie!—what chivalry! what—"

"Disgraceful—is it not? But tell me, my dear madam, what report are you conveying to Lady Belvedere concerning the *jolie fille du Faubourg*?"

"Only what you probably know by heart, as you are sometimes the guest of his father—that *hers* is the parson of the Mordaunts' parish."

"And are such uninteresting despatches worth taking your horses so far out of the way as Belgrave Square?"

"Hardly, I admit! But Lady Belvedere promised me a charming *cadeau*, if I would take the trouble of calling! What do you say to an enamelled *bonbonnière* with a Petitot in the lid—said to be the very one in which the celebrated Maréchale de l'Hôpital, formerly Marie Mignot, used to offer *dragées* every day to Casimir, King of Poland, while coaxing him into an offer of his hand?"

"What do I *say*? Why that Lady Bel. pays as largely for priority of information as the 'Times' or 'Journal des Débats!' Should you find her at home, pray tell her I will acquaint her, for half the money, of more than all she wants to know concerning the birth, parentage, and education of Emma Cromer."

Sir Herbert would have accomplished her ladyship's purpose far better, however, could he have satisfied her curiosity concerning the

subject of her *tête-à-tête* with Reresby Mordaunt at the conversazione of Lady Madrepore. For plain enough to all present was the emotion betrayed in the countenances of both, when, in his anxiety to obtain intelligence concerning Magdalen, and unwitting of the estrangement that had sprung up between the Hall and the Rectory, he inquired "what news her father had brought from the country concerning the family at Deasmarsh, and what news of his own?"

Indignant at his audacity, Emma fixed her eyes upon him with an intentness purporting to convert him into marble, but which had only the effect of making the conscious young man blush scarlet, as she replied—"You allude, no doubt, to my cousin Magdalen? My father did not see her during his trip to Deaswold. The two families no longer meet. An idle village rumour relative to some mysterious meetings at Deasmill, last winter, produced a serious misunderstanding between my father and uncle."

"I was not aware that they had quarrelled. But I fancy Mr. Cromer of the Hall is a pertinacious, irritable man," said Reresby, looking as uneasy as his worst enemy could desire.

"Irritable indeed! My poor cousin has a sad time of it!" resumed Emma, almost sternly. "Though papa did not *see* her, he was told by the gentleman who has taken his duty that she is looking wretched—and no longer the same person as when last autumn, at the close of the shooting season, she was so beset by your and Sir Herbert Glynne's pointers!"

"She could afford *that*: for *then* she was the loveliest creature I ever beheld!" said Reresby, beginning to suspect that his little plaything of former days was taking the liberty of talking at him. And for a moment Emma was startled out of her self-possession.

"There is much to render poor dear Magdalen unhappy at home," she continued, after a moment's pause. "No friend—no companion—no sympathy in her own family—"

At which announcement the assumed coolness of Reresby gave place to manifestations of anxiety.

"And now that the displeasure of her father and mother has broken all bounds," continued Emma, watching his changes of countenance, which almost mollified her resentment, "I fear she leads a wretched life."

"It is some time," stammered Reresby, fancying she paused for a reply, "since I heard news of Cromer Hall."

"And if you *had*, the domestic history of so insignificant a family as ours is scarcely likely, I fear, to engage your attention," was Emma's supercilious rejoinder. "Still I fancied that from the circumstance of your brother being at Cambridge—"

"I have not seen him since the autumn. Tom spent the vacation at Burtsmill."

"In that case," resumed Miss Cromer, a little subdued, "you are not likely to have heard of my cousin Stephen's rustication; since

which, he has been living at home; disquieting his family as much by his ill-temper, as, when at college, by his ill-conduct."

"And to the despotism of this ill-conditioned brute is my poor Magdalen hourly exposed!" mused Reresby. And, for a moment, he felt ashamed of his too ready abdication of independence, and resolved to obtain from his father, if not exemption from his promise, at least permission to communicate more freely with her to whom in all honour and faith he had plighted his troth. Such was the true origin of those demonstrations of emotion on the part of the young couple, which more discerning persons than Emuna's chaperon might have been excused for attributing to the impulses of secret attachment.

"I can promise you, my dear sir," said Lady Barton to the Rector, after a florid description of this party, from which his instinctive horror of blueism had caused him to absent himself, "I can promise you that the attentions of Mr. Reresby Mordaunt to my niece are the theme of general observation. Professor Slidderbottom inquired whether they were not engaged lovers. Nay, I received congratulations on the subject from more than one of those illustrious friends of the late Sir Nicholas who frequent Lady Madrepore's coterie."

Jacob replied only by a heavy sigh. Grievous was it to his affectionate and candid nature to apprehend that the child of his heart had been deceiving him. The seemingly guileless manner in which Emma had replied to the inquiries prompted by the Squire's malicious report, had completely satisfied his honest confiding mind. But now that the disinterested testimony of Lady Barton concerning the origin of Emma's repinings at Deaswold and fretfulness in town, of her wasted form and altered countenance, and, above all, of the evident understanding subsisting between her and Mordaunt, afforded such undeniable grounds of suspicion, he was doubtful only whether to hazard an appeal to the love and duty of his child, or wait till the reaction of her natural instincts of affection recalled to her young mind that no human protection, no human attachment, can ever rival the love with which "a father pitieth his own children!"

CHAPTER XX.

As the poor frightened deer, that stands at gaze,
Wildly determining which way to fly,
Or one encompass'd with a winding maze,
That cannot tread the way out readily,
So with herself is she in mutiny,
To live or die, which of the twain were better,
When Life is shamed, and Death Reproach's debtor.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE situation of Magdalen meanwhile was fully as deserving of

compassion as her cousin had described it. Over *her* destinies no doating father extended the protection of his prayers; nor did a single ray of this world's sunshine intervene to lighten the dreariness of her fate. Nay, she was regarded at the Hall as one who afforded neither pleasure nor profit, and on whom a vast deal of useless accomplishment had been thrown away. The Squire, indeed, indulged in a vague kind of conviction that it was all the fault of the cotton-spinner; that, had not his daughter been out-blazed by the superior advantages of dress and fortune enjoyed by Matilda Mordaunt, the son of Lord Melfont might have bent his knee at Cromer Hall, instead of Deasmarsh Park. But he did nothing to improve her opportunities of mixing with the world. Every year he saw less and less of his country neighbours; unable to pardon their intimacy with the Mordaunts, and unwilling to bring his meagre cheer into comparison with the prodigal hospitality of the *novus homo*.

But it was not solace from without that was wanting to Magdalen. To join the finest archery-meeting ever collected at Grovynor Chase would not have afforded her a moment's satisfaction. Nothing comprised just then within the limits of Northamptonshire would have sufficed to quicken the current of her blood. Amidst the domestic storms evoked at the Hall by the misconduct of her elder brother, and the audacity with which, as heir in tail to an inalienable property, he stood his ground against the irate Squire, she maintained the same unnatural apathy, the same oppression of body and mind, which had hung over her ever since she became aware of the unjust aspersions she had caused to attach to her innocent cousin, and the unbrotherly feud she had provoked between her father and uncle. Of the dreadful discovery since made at Deasmill, less had reached her, perhaps, than any other person in the parish. Before a girl of her years, it was not likely to be canvassed, accident alone having rendered her cousin Emma cognizant of the circumstance. She was vaguely aware that an inquest had been held in the village on the body of a child supposed to have been murdered, but, on hazarding an inquiry concerning the verdict, had been too roughly silenced by her brother to revert to the subject.

Though debarred from all intercourse with the Rector, she seemed to feel a sort of solace and support so long as her uncle and cousin remained in the country; and on learning their sudden journey to London, all courage forsook her heart. The weedy, ill-kept shrubberies, in which she was accustomed to loiter away hour after hour, chiefly to escape the surly company of her brother Stephen, who seemed to take pleasure in venting upon the feeblest thing within reach the ill-humour engendered by his father's reproaches, seemed suddenly to have become too lonely for endurance; and one afternoon, when the Squire and his son had proceeded on the pony and the old bay mare to Basinghill, for the

despatch of turnpike business with Aristobulus Settringham, she took one of those desperate resolutions that sometimes dart like a knife into the breasts of the unhappy, and hurried through the plantations and down the green lane to Deasmill! Some latent hope was in her soul that Reresby might have broken the promise extorted by his father (which he had announced in the letter conveyed to her hands, after much difficulty and delay, by Mrs. Clemson), that, as miserable as herself, *like* herself, his powers of patience might be exhausted. Perhaps, *perhaps* he had written again! Perhaps a precious letter might be waiting for her at Deasmill! With every pulse in her frame throbbing from fear and excitement, she skimmed along the green lane, pausing ever and anon to listen whether, amid the hum of summer insects, the rustling of birds in the hedges, and reptiles startled away amid the long grass of the high embankment, no sound was discernible of other footsteps than her own! But

The beating of her own heart
Was all the sound she heard!—

No one was at hand but the troubled girl, who had visited the spot so much too often for her peace.

Had any unseen spectator witnessed the look of anguish with which Magdalen Cromer surveyed the scene of her former happiness,—the spot on which, for months, she had not ventured to feast her eyes,—the emotion that filled them with unshed tears, and caused her finely-formed lips to tremble, might possibly have been connected with the tragedy by which that fatal spot was made memorable in the eyes of the village. For though the remorse of her innocent heart was as different from the dark shadow that dogs the steps of crime as the briar-rose from the deadly nightshade with which it intermingles its bloom, the beautiful face of Magdalen was as pale, and her gait as irresolute, as though, indeed, she were approaching a spot which blood-guiltiness rendered terrible to her soul.

Scarcely had she courage to turn the latch of the Clemsons' garden-gate; scarcely self-possession to note the neglected aspect of the place, so smiling with flowers the preceding summer! The sound of coming footsteps, however, now rare at Deasmill, had already brought poor Mrs. Clemson to the threshold of her deserted house; and in *her* appearance, at least, the change was not to be overlooked. No sooner did the old lady recognize her visitor, than her hands were outspread to motion her back.

"Oh! Miss Magdalen, Miss Magdalen!" said she, when, instead of obeying the signal, the anxious girl glided forward to express sympathy in her indisposition—"don't come here, my dear! Don't do yourself no further mischief by venturing again to this fated place!"

"I should have been here long ago, had I guessed you were ill,"

replied Miss Cromer, who made no movement to retire. "But, having found myself watched at my last visit, I did not dare return."

"Right, my dear young lady, quite right! But you should not be here *now*! Harm enough has come of your visits already."

"Not to you, I hope, my kind friend?" rejoined Magdalen, taking between her own the old woman's wasted hand.

"Ay, both to me and mine, and you and yours!" she replied, mournfully shaking her head, while retreating hurriedly into her house, so as to draw in with her the guest whom a moment before she had warned to depart. "And *that* it is, Miss Magdalen, which is carrying me down to my grave! For 'tis a hard thing to have lived without reproach till the hairs are grey upon one's head, and then find one's neighbours turn their backs upon one. And if so be the wicked tongues which have so troubled themselves about us was to see you here, my dear, at this moment—"

"I came only," replied Magdalen, faintly (overpowered at finding herself once more in that well-remembered room), "I came only to thank you for the letter which, some time ago, I received, thanks to your interference; and to inquire," added she, in a lower voice, "whether, perhaps, another might not have reached you from the same quarter?"

"How should a letter reach me *now*?" cried the old lady, with sudden sternness. "Mr. Reresby's been gone from Deasmarsh for months and months; and out of sight's out of mind, as maybe you've found to your cost, Miss Magdalen: for you look sadly ill, my dear, and not what you used, when the brisk air, last autumn, brought brightness into your face."

"I have not been very well, or very happy," added Miss Cromer, as if to deprecate any feeling of animosity against her on the part of her hostess.

"If I'd only known, my dear young lady," returned the old woman, a little moved by the plaintive tones of her voice, "where to have addressed Mr. Reresby in Lon'on (which is so vast a place that, even though a parliament man, my letter might be slow of reaching him), I should have made bold to write, to let him know the trouble we've got into on his account. But I didn't like to try and find out at Deasmarsh; first, for fear he might think it was compensation I wanted, but most of all from the great anxiety he always showed that nothing should be known in his family of his acquaintance with yourself."

"He was, indeed, always sadly in fear of discovery," said Magdalen, with a desponding wave of the head.

"Seeing which, I hadn't heart to write. And now that Miss Matilda and her mamma have ceased to set foot in the place, I've no longer no chance of hearing anything of him, no more than yourself. And rightly I'm served, God knows, for meddling and making in what I knew to be wrong, but hadn't the heart to refuse to the boy I'd dandled on my knee! To be sure neither he, nor I, nor no one

could give a guess how black matters would turn out, and to what wicked lies they'd give rise. Not on *your* account, Miss Magdalen, but your poor cousin's, who lay senseless in this very room, on yonder bed, from only looking at the corpse : little thinking, poor lamb, what evil thoughts her tender-heartedness was giving rise to : and how even her own flesh and blood, her own natural uncle, if natural he can be called—"

"I thought," interrupted a gruff voice, so near them as to cause both Mrs. Clemson and her guest to start and tremble, "I thought, wife, I'd made my will plain understood as I wouldn't have no more young ladies a tamperin' under my roof?" grumbled old Clemson, who had entered the room unobserved, attracted by the unusual sound of conversation within his doors. "Haven't we had trouble and shame enow already?"

"Miss Cromer hasn't set foot in this house these six months, Thomas," pleaded the embarrassed wife.

"And bad's the luck she ever set foot in it at all!" cried Clemson, striking his staff on the ground. "I don't want to think no harm o' no un, nor to say no harm o' no un. But whether the young lady have a right to look honest folks in the face, or whether she han't, if ever she darkens *my* doors again, I'd have her to know *my* leave'll be wantin'!"

Though unable to divine the cause of his indignation, there scarcely needed this hint to hasten Magdalen from the house. Of her former visits to Deasmill he had manifested no disapproval ; and fifty murdered infants found in the Deas would not have instigated a surmise in *her* mind that such an event could be connected by the wildest scandal-monger with her own name or her cousin's. But, on taking her trembling way across the lane back to her father's plantations, inexpressibly humiliated by the consciousness of expulsion from the spot to which she had been heretofore welcomed with reverence and affection, it occurred to her that in spite of Mrs. Clemson's protestations, she might know more of the proceedings of Reresby than she chose to avow.

"It was for *his* sake only they were kind to me," murmured she ; "and it is because aware that he has grown indifferent, they receive me thus roughly. Yes! even *he* has abandoned me; and what now remains to comfort me for my breach of duty towards my parents, and the forfeiture of my self-respect?"

Of the malicious rumours which had long caused her village-pensioners to look so sad, and the old people whom she sometimes stopped by the way to inquire after their infirmities, to answer in blunt monosyllables, how was a being so innocent as Magdalen to conjecture the origin? That the blackest suspicions rested upon her young cousin, and that the piece of silk found round the throat of the dead infant at Deasmill (having been recognized as the fragment of a handkerchief often seen in the hands of her brother Stephen) pointed her out as the supposed confederate and accom-

plice of the guiltless Emma, was the last thing likely to reach her ears. And though a thousand trifles tended to substantiate the suspicions of the evil-minded of Deaswold, the feud between the two brothers, the enforced separation between the two cousins, the devotions of the Cromer Hall family transferred to Basinghill as a security against any accidental encounter, and finally the departure of the delinquent for London, unable longer to face the murmurs of the parish,—to Magdalen, all this was as non-existent as, to an ordinary wanderer over the earth's surface, the unexplored mines under his feet.

In the despondency of her solitary grief, often did she pray for early death—often wish that she was lying beside her sisters in a grave where those who had rejected and deserted her would never bend their careless way. The sight of Deasmarsh in all its brilliant sunshine of prosperity was becoming almost as hateful to *her* eyes as to those of her father. The name of Mordaunt sounded in her ears as that of an enemy. The thought of worldly riches became pain and grief to her; convinced that they had hardened against her the heart at one time so fondly her own. The denunciations of Scripture against the rich man rose unconsciously to her lips; and the worthy cotton-spinner who, if released from his engagements with the Freshleys and cognizant of her sincere affection for his son, would have taken Magdalen to his heart as a daughter-in-law had she been the offspring of the Clemsons or the poorest cotter of Deaswold, instead of its lord of the manor, existed in her mind as a son of pride and perdition, predestined to the doom of Dives!

Sometimes, indeed, the better instincts of her gentle nature prevailed; and she reproached herself for being less grateful than she ought to the Providence which extended around her the vernal glory of the woods, and to her careworn heart rendered the still watches of the night so pure and holy and refreshing; and at such moments as these, with tears of tenderness streaming down her face, she found it difficult to refrain from addressing a few lines, at all risks, to Reresby, and telling him of all she was suffering for his sake. The prohibitions of his father had no authority over *her*. Better she should put her destiny to the proof. Better appeal to the candour of her affianced husband. If forgotten, better know it at once! Six more months of her present state of misery and suspense would be worse than death.

More than once had she beguiled the loneliness of her forlorn hours by inditing such a letter; and more than once had it been hastily destroyed, in the compunctious dread of causing an unhappy moment to Reresby, by transgressing his interdiction. Even when, at last, one, longer and fonder, and more explicit than all the rest, had been redeemed from destruction as incapable of provoking his displeasure, how was it to be conveyed to the post, the letter-bag for which passed invariably through the hands of

her father? For Magdalen was of too noble a turn of mind to have confidants among the servants; nor had she ever ascertained by whose hand the packet despatched by Mrs. Clemson was placed in her chamber.

On one point, however, still more difficult to decide than the transmission of her despatch, she had thoroughly made up her mind. To the uncle whose goodness she so fully appreciated—the uncle who had comforted her at the trying moment of parting from her sisters—she would confide the difficulties of her situation the moment he returned to the country. In spite of whatever vengeance might fall upon her, should her father discover that they had met, she would contrive an interview with the Rector. If his advice did not avail to clear up her way before her, at least his kindly word would give her strength to bear on to the end.

The very resolution to unbosom what weighed so heavily on her mind, seemed to afford relief; and, with a more cheerful countenance than she had worn for months, she accompanied her family one evening to one of those summer tea-drinkings at Basinghill Manor, which constituted the dissipations of Cromer Hall. Her father, though he made a standing grievance of such visits, had accepted in the present instance the Miss Moulseys' invitation; the ill-terms on which he lived with his son placing him sadly in want of listeners on whom to vent the paroxysms of rabid animosity engendered by the progressive enfranchisement of trade, and the defeats of the Protectionists. Aristobulus Settringham might be an ass. But if the enjoyment of a small attachéship in the eighteenth century entitled him to fancy himself a diplomat, the proprietorship of seventy acres of arable land sufficed to constitute him a champion of the corn-laws. The Squire felt that it would be a comfort to hear even so small a voice crying "Amen" to his diatribes against the uncourtly-gentlemanlike politics of Deasmarsh.

Scarcely had he patience to reply with fitting courtesy to the compliments of Miss Moulsey, or bestow the encomiums exacted by Miss Araminta on the brilliancy of her flower-beds, so eager was he to seize Aristobulus by the button, and launch forth into the Jeremiads to which the ears of his family had become as much accustomed as to the cawing of his rookery. But alas! for his powers of self-government, the man in whose density of intellect his soul trusted as companion with his own, had enlisted, at that epoch of sudden conversions, under the banner of the enemy! Betwixt the Thursday morning and Friday night, the arrival of his cousin Mr. Settringham from town, with tidings of the hopelessness of the cause to the skirts of which Aristobulus had pinned with a minnikin pin his very diminutive adhesion, had sufficed to enlist him among those *gros bataillons* which Providence is said to favour!

When Aristobulus adverted, in answer to one of Mr. Cromer's

explosions of wrath against the advocates of Corn-law emancipation, to the luminous speech of the young member for Castle Dangan, he probably calculated on the impunity of being housed on the ground-floor, with windows opening to the lawn: so pugnacious was the attitude and so defying the countenance of the Squire.

"The truth is, my dear ma'am," continued the ex-diplomat, turning, secure of their suffrage, towards the two spinsters with whose affections he was accustomed to trifle alternately, like Horace Walpole with others of higher note, "we must take the colour of our opinions from the times we live in. We must not seek our political principles in our own pockets. We must not point to a rent-roll for the exposition of a creed. We must look to the convictions of the country, the *necessities* of the country! The dumb have been taught to speak, and the deaf must be made to hear. Reluctantly, therefore, but with conscientious self-abnegation, I trample my interests under foot, and proclaim myself a free-trader.

"I am not altogether hopeless, my dear Mr. Cromer," added Aristobulus, turning with an air of magnanimous superiority towards the Squire, "of seeing you become a convert to our cause. I find from my cousin that young Mordaunt has already made proof of his eloquence, by bringing round to his opinions *one* member of your family."

Already bursting with rage, to find himself lumped with his brother the parson appeared the unkindest cut of all! And so desirous was the Squire to convey his sentiments of disgust at the liberty taken with him by such a junction in the strongest and most comprehensive words, that, balked by his ambition, he said nothing.

"Settringham informs me," added Aristobulus, taking advantage of his "fix," "that he met our friend Jacob repeatedly in town; though, from my previous knowledge of your quiet brother, I confess I never should have suspected him of frequenting the chaos worse confounded which my well-beloved cousin is pleased to call the world of letters."

"And Miss Emma?" inquired Araminta Moulsey, regardless of the indignation that appeared to be working like barm in the bosom of the Squire.

"Oh! Miss Emma, to the honour of her luck or her discernment," added Aristobulus facetiously, "has drawn the *gros lot*, the thirty thousand pounds prize. It appears that young Mordaunt, who is now one of the stars of the day, never leaves her side. The young couple are inseparable."

"I guessed as much!" cried the Squire, concentrating his long-repressed wrath into a single explosion. "I guessed it from the cold-blooded effrontery with which my brother denied the existence of any understanding between them, and the girl herself rebutted my charge of having met the unprincipled scamp secretly at Deasmill!"

"*At Deasmill?*" reiterated the two spinsters and their weazened beau, for whom, as for all the neighbourhood, the very name of that ill-starred spot had acquired a lugubrious significance.

"Ay—last autumn, day after day, in the deserted mill!" cried Mr. Cromer, almost incoherent from passion. "The very place where my brother or his daughter hit upon the body of a murdered child! But, as others besides myself remarked on the occasion, 'those who hide can find.'"

"My dear Mr. Cromer," argued his wife in a tone of plaintive remonstrance—"you forget that Magdalen is present!"

Not more, however, than the rest of the party had forgotten it! And when, on Mrs. Cromer's hint, the elder of the two spinsters turned towards the window near which Magdalen had placed herself, as if to inhale the fragrance of a flower-garden as choice as the flower-gardens of spinsters are apt to be, to beg she would draw her chair nearer to the tea-table, a loud exclamation drew the attention of all present towards the poor girl who, speechless and pale as ashes, sat as if stricken with palsy.

By Araminta and her sister, not a little shocked at the indiscreet allusions which the Squire had hazarded in their presence so as to "break the good meeting with most admired disorder," her sudden indisposition was naturally attributed to horror at hearing her cousin Emma so cruelly spoken of. "Poor girl, poor girl!" whispered they, after hartshorn, ether, and sal-volatile had been offered without producing the smallest effect in restoring colour to her cheek or meaning to her eye; "she is too delicate and tender-hearted to be dealt with after justice-room fashion! But Mr. Cromer is a sadly coarse-minded man. Mr. Cromer was never intended by Providence for contact with the more delicate sex!"

And as soon as the carriage, re-ordered in haste, had conveyed away the tyrant and the tyrannized, Aristobulus, flattering himself that conviction rather than indignation had produced the silence of the out-argued Squire, added with a conscious smile that, "If unfitted by nature for female society, his worthy neighbour the Squire was quite as little qualified for contact with men of cultivated understanding, extensive information, and knowledge of the world. Mr. Cromer, for instance, would never have been a moment tolerated in the responsible and noble vocation of a diplomatic career!"

And mechanically, the long-practised echoes of Basinghill Cottage replied—"the responsible and noble vocation of a diplomatic career!"

CHAPTER XXI.

— With pleasures too refin'd to please,
 With too much spirit to be e'er at ease,
 With too much quickness ever to be taught,
 With too much thinking to have common thought,
 Purchasing pain with all that joy can give,
 She dies of nothing but the rage to live.

POPE.

THE heir-apparent of Settringham Abbey, too dull a man not to see clearly and report with exactness, had told nothing but the truth. Every time he was in company in London with his Northamptonshire neighbours, he had noticed Reresby Mordaunt and Emma engaged in earnest conversation. For no sooner had the warm-hearted girl wrought upon him to avow the sincerity of his devotion to her cousin, than the generosity of her heart thawed like a well spring at the first genial gleam of spring. A few earnest words of explanation on both sides led to an expansion of mutual confidence; and those who at one time had narrowly risked becoming lovers became readily friends. The affectionate enthusiasm with which Emma spoke of his cousin tended to the revival of impressions in some little danger of becoming obliterated by the all-effacing tides and currents of London engagements; and, on seeing him really and deeply affected by her picture of Magdalen's position at Cromer Hall, the spirit of the worthy Jacob broke forth in his daughter, and she pledged herself to take an early opportunity, on her return to Deaswold, to explain all to her cousin, and satisfy her how truly she was beloved. On learning, however, from Reresby the strenuousness of Mr. Mordaunt's opposition to the match, she rescinded her first proposal that her father should be taken into their councils. Emma was aware that the Rector considered it essential to the well-being of his parish that he should remain on friendly terms with his powerful parishioner; and it would have been hardly fair to embroil them, in order to promote the interests of the lovers. Time enough, at all events, to take the good parson into their confidence, after ascertaining from Magdalen whether there existed the smallest hope of reconciliation between the Rectory and Hall!

There was consequently some ground for the parental uneasiness with which Jacob Cromer noted the progress of an intimacy which he regarded only as a second sowing of the tares he had been at so much pains to eradicate. To what purpose his journey to town, if he were fated to take back to Deaswold a doubly-repining daughter? Unspeakable was the vexation with which he watched the manœuvres of the widow of the late celebrated to get her niece invited by Lady Belvedere and chaperoned by Lady Madrepore, for the sole purpose of being placed in the way of Reresby Mor-

daunt; but, debarred by gratitude for her kindness towards his daughter from remonstrating with all the unction he would fain have exercised, she contrived to have her own way.

"The Countess of Belvedere may be a little flighty," said she, in answer to his arguments. "But she is a woman not only of the highest rank and fashion, but the highest influence; and, should our dear Emma marry and settle in town, will be of the greatest service in introducing her into society."

In vain did the good man protest against the likelihood of such an alliance as she foresaw; in vain assure her that, if married, her husband would be the person to establish his daughter suitably in the world. The prim little widow drew so largely upon her stock of plausibility to convince him that it was the duty of her only sister's widower to submit to her guidance in matters concerning the worldly welfare of her niece, that, with a heavy sigh, he consented to her being hooked for a single evening to the wing of the curiosity-monger. It is true that, when dressed for Lady Belvedere's party and her countenance animated by the hope that she was about to assist in securing the happiness of the cousin she loved so dearly, Emma looked so much prettier and happier than he had seen her for the last twelve months, that the fond father almost forgot his scruples. Moreover, the day was now fixed for their return to the country; and though the idea of home wore a less smiling aspect than heretofore, the Rector armed himself against all unpleasant impressions by a determination that, once more alone with his daughter, he would overlook the feelings of delicacy which had determined him to await her voluntary confidence; and come to such explanations with her on the subject of Deasmarsh and its heir, as must remove the burthen of cares under which he was labouring,

"We who love each other so truly," mused he, when the carriage containing his heart's treasure had driven from the door—"we, who are all in all to each other, and but little I fear to the rest of our fellow-creatures—should be unpardonable if, for want of the courage to appeal to each other's feelings, we allowed clouds to obscure the perfect confidence that ought to exist between father and child."

Had Emma, on the other hand, surmised that she was included in Lady Madrepore's invitation to the *soirée* in Belgrave Square only to gratify the curiosity of a whimsical countess, her pride (not the Cromer pride of belonging to "an old county family," but the pride of petulant girlhood) would have prevented her accepting the invitation. But, thoughtless as she was warm-hearted, it occurred to her as little that her intimacy with Reresby could provoke the jealousy of his fashionable friends, as that it could excite the anxieties of her father; and the pleasure of finding herself in the midst of the most brilliant assemblage she had seen in London so brightened her young and lovely face, that there was some pre-

text for the swelling nostril and curling lip with which the jealous hostess observed how coolly (immediately after her entrance and the ceremonies of introduction) the protégée of Lady Madrepore took the arm of the honourable member for Castle Dangan, and disappeared with into him the refreshment-room.

"Paired off for the remainder of the session!" observed Sir Herbert Glynn, an amused spectator of his noble cousin's astonishment. "For a country-girl, the *coup de main* is really not *amiss*!"

"I thought I understood her to be a Miss Cromer?" observed Lord Richard Lovell, who was standing by and seldom understood things but by halves.

"At all events, a very pretty girl," echoed his Shadow, rightly interpreting the look of admiration with which Lord Richard was following with his eyes the buoyant movements of the happy girl. And on seeing her and Reresby courteously accosted by the Grovynor Grovynors, whom they met by the way, the young Lord and his Shadow decided that the pretty girl with the brown ringlets and hazel eyes was a Northamptonshire belle, and therefore the country-neighbourhood perquisite of young Mordaunt.

"Paired, but not matched, you think?" resumed Sir Herbert, aside to Lady Belvedere, as soon as the two young men had sauntered off for a nearer inspection of that which is hailed with such joy in one of the dead calms of fashionable life—a new face, and a personage *sans antécédens*. "*Que voulez-vous!*—Birds of brightest plumage—pheasant, peacock, or hoopoe—are addicted to the homeliest mates! Do you remember, my dear Lady Bel., when you first desired me to present my friend Mordaunt to you, my telling you that he had a foible for a rustic Perdita?"

But the handsome Countess had become too experienced in the part of Ariadne, to allow her chagrin to become visible; more especially to one possessed of so mocking a tongue as her cousin Herbert. Like most attractive women subject to no control but that of her whims and fancies, Lady Belvedere never trusted to the reality of her prepossession till the object of her preference had escaped her.

The foresight of her vanity inspired her with mistrust. Her dread of being disenchanted on the morrow rendered her incapable of enjoying to-day. *Less* beautiful—*less* gifted—*less* opulent, she would also have been less self-secure, and consequently more susceptible of lasting impressions. But, amid the triumphs of her brilliant existence, she was one of the many destined to flutter their way through the coquetries of successive seasons, hurrying onwards to warm herself in the beams of a setting sun, till twilight apprised her that it was too late.

Lord Fauconberg, who, for a time, had flattered himself of having encaged the Phoenix, and created a real attachment in her heart, had broken his chain with the firm energy of a high-minded

man, on discovering that his devotedness was insufficient to prevent her wandering eye and rapacious vanity from straying in pursuit of the political lion of the day; and Reresby himself, who, though circumstances rendered impossible any pretension to her hand, had been dazzled for a moment by the distinctions accorded him in Belgrave Square, no sooner saw her deserted by Lord Fauconberg, than the charm that seemed to invest her when honoured by the preference of one of the first men of the day disappeared in a moment. Like the maiden in the goblin tale, who, by the sudden withdrawal of the talisman which endows her with the semblance of life, becomes reconverted into a mass of clay, he turned from her almost with loathing. To be abandoned by Lord Fauconberg was a sufficient certificate of demerit.

"*Ainsi va le monde!*" mused Sir Herbert, when he saw his beautiful cousin have recourse to her *flacon*, her gorgeous fan à la Louis XIV., and a handkerchief adorned with filmy lace, to disguise the irritation of mind which *she* conceived to be tender emotion, produced by witnessing Reresby's degradation:—

The eagle, in its pride of place,
Thus by a mousing owl stooped at and killed.

"Another of the gorgeous glasses of fashion's magic lantern irretrievably cracked! Alas! poor Lady Bel! If, instead of wasting the best years of her life in moonraking, she had fallen into the hands of a husband possessing common sense and uncommon good temper, what a charming woman might she have made!"

While still watching the incoherent words and gestures into which his noble kinswoman was betrayed by her desire to ascertain what was going on in the other room, he found himself suddenly harpooned by Lady Madrepore.

"Tell me, I entreat you, dear Sir Herbert," whispered she, in the most mysterious manner, "you who are *l'ami de la maison*,—which is the great man?"

"What great man? Lord William Apreece, who was refused as too tall for the Life Guards?"

"Don't be so provoking; *you* know very well who I mean! Everybody, I find, is in the secret; though he goes about in plain clothes, and would not dine with Lord Aberdeen lest he should be suspected."

"Perhaps you would not object to tell me in plain words the name of the gentleman in plain clothes?"

"That is exactly what we are all dying to find out! This is the first party he has been to. Lady Belvedere, who ought to take out a patent for getting proofs of everything and everybody *avant la lettre*, bespoke him before he landed!"

Certain that, if time were allowed her, the wonder-monger would by degrees unravel her clue of rigmarole, Sir Herbert was not long in finding out that she had been made the object of a hoax. Cad

Rowlandson, a chatterbox nearly as flighty as herself, had persuaded her that the lion of Lady Belvedere's party was a renegade Jesuit, an accredited spy of the Sultan, who had been despatched to London on a secret mission to keep watch over the proceedings of Ibrahim Pasha; and scarcely a man present whose face happened to be strange to her, and sufficiently mahogany of complexion to avouch an Oriental origin, but was exposed to the annoyance of her scrutiny. At length, having fixed, as the hero of her romance, upon a Brazilian *chargé d'affaires* sufficiently dun of visage to warrant the supposition that he was in the habit of taking baths of chocolate, she hurried off in search of her protégée, to communicate the discovery she had made; followed by Sir Herbert, not a little curious to hear the revisions and emendations she would make in her second edition of the story. Nor did the air of satisfaction with which she detected Emma and Reresby Mordaunt seated together in a niche of a vestibule opening to the refreshment-room, escape his observation.

"Conceive what an interesting creature we have here to-night, my dear Mr. Mordaunt!" cried she, pushing forward to accost them. "A young Jesuit, in whom the late pope had such confidence, that he was despatched by his order to Constantinople as a missionary; where, instead of converting others, he became converted in his turn; but, from his origin, he was so much an object of suspicion among the Turks, that his only chance of securing his neck against the bowstring, was by becoming the accredited spy of the Seraglio! Russia and Turkey, as I need not tell you, my dear Mr. Mordaunt, possess a *diplomatie secrète* of *mouchards*, in addition to their *corps diplomatique accrédité*; and this Père Egidius (or, as he is called by the Mussulmans, Hassan Habaddon) has been secretly despatched to England, to protect the interests of the Porte against the intrigues of the Viceroy of Egypt."

"By Jove, she shall edit my next romance!" muttered Sir Herbert, scarcely able to refrain from complimenting Lady Madrepore outright on her genius for amplification. "I no longer wonder," was his secret reflection on the redundancy of her ladyship's organs of invention, "that naked truth is forced to hide herself in a well, since lying presents herself in such flowing robes!"

"Have you any commissions for Northamptonshire, Sir Herbert?" inquired Emma, while Reresby was proceeding to cross-examine Lady Madrepore. "We are on the eve of returning to Deaswold."

And the frank and cheerful manner in which she addressed him, so satisfied him that the country girl was not altogether spoiled by the tinsel and varnish of London life, that he instantly took a seat by her side; and entered as freely into conversation as in those unlucky days at Deasmarsh, when their intimacy excited the anxieties of Matilda.

"And do you not apprehend," said he, "that Deaswold will

appear somewhat weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable to eyes that have been feasting upon *pas de déesses*, and ears accustomed to be tickled by Jullien and Herr Koenig?"

"On the contrary," was Emma's honest reply; "home has gained astonishingly in my estimation by my peep at London! Here, one must be one of the privileged few, to enjoy oneself; whereas, country pleasures are open to all. It is only by especial favour I am the guest of Lady Belvedere to-night. But two days hence, I shall be enjoying the glorious summer sunshine in the midst of the woods and fields, and thanks to no one!"

"Pride, pride, pride!" ejaculated Sir Herbert (not venturing to quote the apostrophe of Milton's Satan, containing a monosyllable not to be lightly named to "ears polite"), "pride, the perdition of the country, as vanity of the town!"

"No, indeed," replied Emma, blushing at finding the finger-post of detection pointed towards her besetting sin: "I have only learned, by privation, the value of the precious hours and pleasant liberty which, at Deaswold, had become too habitual to be appreciated."

"I do not wonder that you have learned to see new charms in Northamptonshire," rejoined Sir Herbert, with a significant glance at Reresby. "You have been studying under an instructor deeply interested in your enlightenment."

"Deeply indeed!" retorted Emma, unable to control an arch smile at seeing even the shrewd Sir Herbert so completely what Lord Richard Lovell would have called "sold and sent home;" or to resist the desire of retaliating, by an allusion to his own flirtations of yore. "But, considering that I have seen *you* submitted to tuition scarcely less partial, your affection for Deaswold and its environs does not exhibit itself by *very* frequent visits."

A sharp pang for a moment impeded the utterance of Sir Herbert! Had Emma been aware how deeply-seated were the feelings of resentment which kept him away from Deasmarsh, she would have hazarded no mention of the subject. But, like others, she was deceived by the liveliness of Sir Herbert Glynne's manner into the belief that he was a *mere* man of the world.

"Considering how strong and how effectively the *sexo peu beau* musters in your part of the county," said he, as soon as he was able to command his voice and spirits sufficiently for jesting, "I am surprised you should have found occasion to note my absence. Have you not my friend Settringham, whom I saw the other night in a stall at the Opera, as brown and withered as a Normandy pippin, listening to Castellan through his double glasses; and, in the self-complacency of his duncehood, declaring that Grisi grows younger and younger every year? Have you not the man-in-buckram, his cousin Abdolonymus—(what's the old diplomat's name?) who used to write 'private and confidential' on his cards of invitation? I say nothing of my friend Reresby, or of the

lively son and heir of the house of Melfont, seeing that they are bespoken!"

"Sacred be the secrets of your friend Reresby," rejoined Emma, glancing at the victim still writhing in the clutches of Lady Madrepore with an audacity which Sir Herbert indignantly attributed to the pernicious lessons of a London season. "But, as regards Mr. Melfont, I fear it will be some time before Lady Madrepore obtains possession of the tiles from Persepolis she has commissioned him to add to her museum, on his return from the East."

"Melfont—George Melfont—uprooted from his native clay, and become a wanderer like the rest of us?" cried Sir Herbert, startled out of all self-possession. "I should as soon have expected to hear of the expatriation of the Duke of York's Column!"

"*Homme propose, femme dispose!*" replied Emma, shrugging her shoulders. "One of the painters of the day is said to have scraped to pieces one of the pictures of the old masters, in hopes to discover the secret of their colouring."

"And whom has Melfont been scraping? His lady mother, I hope! I never saw a façade in greater need of new pointing!"

"I mean," said Emma, piqued at what she conceived to be his wilful misconception, "that after asking himself in vain what could be the superior merit in Sir Herbert Glynne inducing Miss Mordaunt to prefer him to a peerage, Melfont Park, and a rent-roll that would reach from hence to Cadogan Place, he at length decided it to be the enlightenment produced by much travel. So he has even saddled his camel like the rest of you."

"This is the most extraordinary story!" said Herbert in an altered voice. "But no! I see how it is! You are making just such an example of my credulity as Cad Rowlandson of that of your chaperon!"

"You would not say so, had you called with papa and me, ten days ago, in Queen Anne Street, and seen poor dear Lady Melfont supervising the preparations for the exile of her fatted calf: the remedies for ophthalmia, the antidotes to venomous bites, the air-cushions and Mackintoshed tubs which were gathering together against the departure of the overland mail!"

"And you mean that he is actually gone?"

"Actually gone. Lord Melfont returned from Southampton, two days since, after seeing him off."

"Strange," observed Sir Herbert, though more to himself than to his companion, "that Reresby should never have mentioned the subject to me!"

"I suspect it is a sore one to the whole family," rejoined Emma, taking the remark to herself. "Anxious as they were that Miss Mordaunt should relent in Mr. Melfont's favour, because convinced that the marriage would ensure her happiness, it must have been provoking enough to see her again and again refuse an

alliance which would have settled her in their immediate neighbourhood at once and for ever."

"There certainly were strong reasons for Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt's forwarding the match," said Sir Herbert, becoming suddenly candid and liberal, on ascertaining that parental persuasion had effected nothing towards the establishment of George Melfont's pretensions. "It was but natural they should prefer having her within their reach in Northamptonshire, to running the risk of a residence in Ireland!"

"A residence in Ireland? What a horrible alternative!" cried Emma, far from suspecting the drift of his logic. "But who ever talked of her going to Ireland? Who ever *thought* of her going to Ireland?"

Sir Herbert accused himself, of course, of being unpardonably absent; and expressed a sort of blundering belief that Lord Melfont possessed estates in the sister island—"and as fathers are apt to settle on their sons when they marry," continued he, "the house they find damp or the estates they consider least eligible, I was stupid enough to fancy that the noble couple capable of residing in Queen Anne Street might condemn their heir-apparent to Tipperary."

Luckily for the credit of his veracity, the colloquy between Lady Madrepore and Reresby was interrupted by Lady Mary Grovynor Grovynor's fidgeting up to the honourable member for Castle Dangan, to inquire the name and address of a detector-lock manufacturer, whose handiworks she had admired at Deasmars, and was eager to recommend to the notice of Ibrahim Pasha; for, while her ladyship was informing herself with much questioning of what a glance at the "London Directory" would have certified in a moment, Lady Madrepore fastened herself once more on her protégée; and Sir Herbert Glynne, as thoroughly transformed in nature since he entered the room as a chrysalis transmuted into a butterfly, could scarcely restrain his spirits within decent bounds, while enjoying his favourite sport of applying the magnifying glass to her absurdities. He rendered her the happiest of women by presenting to her as the Mahomedanized Jesuit the unfortunate Don Manoëlo, who became the most puzzled of men by her mysterious allusions to his secret vocation, and her hints that in the rotund form of Lady Mary Grovynor Grovynor he beheld one of the overgrown beauties of Ibrahim; and had not Emma, the business of whose evening was now despatched, expressed a wish to escape from the heated throng, where "man delighted her not nor woman either," the news of George Melfont's intended introduction to the Plagues of Egypt (more intoxicating to Sir Herbert Glynne than a whole case of champagne!) might have betrayed him into extravagance beyond the toleration of his noble cousin and her guests.

CHAPTER XXII.

No might nor greatness in mortality
 Can censure 'scape; back-wounding calumny
 The whitest virtue strikes. What thing so strong
 Can tie the gall up of a sland'rous tongue!

SHAKESPEARE.

"How beautiful, how refreshing!" exclaimed Emma to her father, as they were borne homeward the following day, by the wings of steam, through woods and valleys that seemed to revive them as by a bath of verdure, after the stony desert of the great metropolis.

"Refreshing indeed!" echoed the Rector. "I account it first among the blessings of Providence to be fated to lead a country life, a destiny that renders it both easier to live, and easier to die."

There was some pretext for their expansion of feeling. To escape the fuss, and fidget, and much ado about nothing of Lady Barton's establishment, was a relief in itself; and the country, in its brightest effulgence of midsummer glories, appeared to their eager eyes as if tricked out for a fête. The gardens and fields were so full of flowers, the plains so loaded with produce, the air so fragrant, the waters so limpid, that nature seemed to be holding her court, and outshining in her raiment, wrought about with divers colours, the embroidered mantle of kings.

And when at length they reached the station of Darley Level, and discerned the beautiful woods of Deasmarsh dotting the hills, both father and daughter exclaimed once more in the fulness of their hearts—"how beautiful, how refreshing!"

The green vistas of Mr. Mordaunt's park, the distant glitter of the Deas, the cheerful aspect of the well-detached stone mansion-house, and, above all, the air of comfort and prosperity diffused over the place and its inhabitants, appeared to strike Emma as for the first time, on winding along the road leading from the station to the Rectory.

"Don't you think, papa," said she, as though her mind were giving a loose to pleasant anticipations, "don't you think that a woman must be indeed hard to please if, able to live and die at Deasmarsh, she sighed after London pleasures?"

And the tone of exultation in which she spoke, while looking forward to the happiness of her cousin Magdalen, which in the romantic fervour of her disposition she fancied about to be secured by her interposition, induced a hope on the part of her father that, now they were about to be alone together again in the country, she would lose no time in opening her heart. But so completely did she appear to be giving way to her feelings, that he determined, should she again relapse into reserve, to surmount his reluctance,

and afford her those paternal warnings and monitions of which she stood so much in need. He dreaded the thoughts of standing face to face with Mordaunt, so long as, by shrinking from a full explanation with Emma, he had not placed himself aloof from the confederacy of the young people.

The welcome to the country afforded him by his wealthy neighbour served to double his compunctious visitings. The hearty salutations of Mordaunt, or rather the salutations which, instead of being hearty, as formerly, were almost affectionate, touched to the quick the heart of the Rector. For *he* did not perceive that an inflexion of pity modulated the voice of his friendly neighbour. Before the proprietor of Deasmarsh had been twenty minutes in the Rectory parlour, however, his manner completely altered. Not because his friend Jacob appeared so ill at ease as to call for some exertion of cheerfulness to relieve his embarrassment. Not because Jacob's daughter made her appearance, bright and smiling as when he first beheld her in that very room, looking like a new-blown flower in a spring morning. But because the political questions, which he expressly avoided canvassing from a desire to eschew strife with a neighbour so respected, were frankly approached by the Rector. Satisfied of the conscientious motive of his conversion to more liberal principles than those which, like parasites, clung to the family tree of the Cromers, which they rendered barren by their prurient growth, he had no fear that his honesty would be mistrusted by an honest man. But though Jacob candidly avowed his change of opinion to have been produced by an examination of the position and necessities of the country unwarpd by the personal and professional bias of which it was less easy to divest himself at home, attributing the enlargement of his views to the arguments of a variety of first-rate men, independent in mind and condition, with whom he had latterly come in contact, Mr. Mordaunt felt as convinced as though the fact had passed under his eyes, that it was by Reresby alone the conversion of his worthy neighbour had been effected; that, though Leaguers and Chartists had spouted and pamphletized in vain, and a potato panic conspired with the Houynhim eloquence of the handicap Chatham to disgust him with the tenets and advocates of monopoly, it had needed but a touch of the skilful scalpel of Reresby to relieve him from his strabismus.

In the joy of his paternal triumph, therefore, Mordaunt forgot the compassionate impulses which had suggested his early visit to the Rectory. A flush of joy rose to his face. His eye brightened. His heart became as light as a feather, (as light as Emma's, who could scarcely contain her spirits at finding herself once more her own mistress in her own home, the trusted delegate from one so highly regarded to another so much beloved!) In the elation of his soul, he could talk of nothing but London, the young member for Castle Dangan, the golden opinions he had won, and the

bright career awaiting him; till poor Jacob was fain to walk to the open window, and conceal, by staring out upon his new-mown lawn, his embarrassing sense of the sad disappointment awaiting this ambitious father.

"And what day will you fix to come and dine at Deasmarsh, my dear young lady?" said the happy man, how little suspecting the origin of Jacob's chagrin! "The sooner the better! Our neighbours are most of them still in town; so that we have nothing to offer you, just now, likely to satisfy a London belle. But my wife and daughter will rejoice to see you again; and I have a world of parish business to talk over with your father."

An invitation so friendly could be accepted only in the same cordial spirit; and with a heavy heart did the Rector find himself crossing once more the threshold and sharing the bread and salt of the man towards whom he fancied himself playing the part of Judas. All the pleasure of traversing that beautiful domain, which he regarded with the partial eye of one who, having watched the unpromising child of a friend expand into beauty or manliness, sympathizes in his parental pride,—all the satisfaction of gazing upon so exquisite a combination of woods and waters, and flowers such as paradise may have rejoiced in,—was lost in the guilty feeling that he was tacitly included in a conspiracy against his friend! It struck him, indeed, (though the suspicion might perhaps arise from the morbid state of his own feelings) that the countenance and manner of Mordaunt were already a little changed towards him since the preceding day. His welcome, if not less kind, was *different* from what he expected. There was an air of concern and embarrassment on the part of his host, for which he found it hard to account. To Emma, more particularly, the formality of his greeting was unmistakable. Not that *she* appeared conscious of any want of cordiality. The coldness of Mrs. Mordaunt and Matilda appeared of small consequence to one who had now discovered that the steeple of her village was not a landmark for the earth: that there were places and people, among whom Deasmarsh and the Mordaunts were of as small account as the community of an ant-hill, and in whose regard Deaswold Rectory enjoyed higher consideration. The inconsistency with which their favour towards her had varied as with the mutability of a weather-glass, had diminished, moreover, their value in her eyes. For capricious people never inspire respect; and so little in common with those of her father were her feelings in revisiting the once-loved spot, that she exulted in her advantage over them as the depository of Reresby's secret.

The brilliancy of her smiles and newly-acquired *aplomb* of her manner, were of course attributed by Matilda and her mother to the self-conceit engendered by her London triumphs. Her incidental allusions to her recent pleasures seemed intended to apprise them that the daughter of their parish priest had been welcomed

into circles from which the family of Mordaunt, the cotton-spinner, would have been excluded; and though she spoke of "my aunt, Lady Barton," only when it was indispensable, the name recurred in her anecdotes often enough to give offence.

When, in reply to Mrs. Mordaunt's measured and embarrassed inquiry whether Miss Cromer had lately seen her son, Emma answered with audacious glibness, "Oh, yes!—he put me into the carriage only three nights ago, after a very pleasant party at Lady Belvedere's in Belgrave Square," the indignation of both mother and daughter was completed by the coolness with which she added, "You probably know Lady Belvedere by name, as she is the cousin of your friend Sir Herbert Glynne?"

"The name of Lady Belvedere is very generally known," was the ceremonious rejoinder of Mrs. Mordaunt; who appeared so little to encourage the conversation, that Emma turned towards the daughter to add, "Sir Herbert was, of course, at the party in Belgrave Square; and, finding I was about to return home, charged me with a thousand compliments to Deasmarsh."

The vivid colour which, at this allusion, overspread the fine face of Matilda Mordaunt, proved that, in *her* estimation, it added insult to injury. A juster appreciation of Emma's frank and earnest character might have satisfied her that, had her suspicions of Sir Herbert's defection been just, his name would never have escaped the lips of her rival. But, in her present perverse mood, convinced by Emma's insolent liveliness that the purpose of her sojourn in town was accomplished, that her wedding-clothes were in progress, and that nothing but a special licence was wanting to convert her into Lady Glynne, of Glynne Manor, she could scarcely summon courage for even the monosyllables occasionally necessary in reply to her sallies.

Far other, however—far, *far* more serious—was the origin of the abstraction of mind that rendered Mr. Mordaunt's exposition to the Rector of justice and vestry business transacted since his departure, so different from his usual lucidity! The customary clearness of his mind and consistency of his reasoning seemed blurred into unaccountable confusion; and his poor conscience-stricken guest, after vainly endeavouring to comprehend what was incomprehensible, sat watching in secret consternation for some sudden explosion of the smothered feelings that were thus distracting his soul. No unusual demonstration, however, occurred; and the affectionate manner in which the hand of the Rector was wrung at parting by his host, served to prove that, whatever might be Mordaunt's suspicions concerning the attachment of his son, the father of its object had no share in his displeasure. The usually firm and serene mind of Mordaunt was, in fact, so disturbed, that, at present, he had scarcely determined on whom his displeasure ought to fall.

An interview had been asked of him that morning by young

Milnward, preparatory to his departure from Deaswold; which, concluding it to be a farewell visit of acknowledgment for hospitalities received during the preceding six weeks, was granted without a thought. But from the distressed countenance and embarrassed air with which his visitor entered the room, Mordaunt saw at once that some matter of deeper moment must be in agitation. He was, in fact, compelled to exhort him, more than once, to explain the motives of his visit, ere the young man, so calm and clear in the pulpit, could overcome the emotions under which he laboured.

"It would be difficult for me to express, sir," he began, "the mental struggle against which I have been contending for some days past, as to the propriety of waiting upon you before I quit this place, to relieve my mind from a grievous burthen under which it is labouring; or whether, at all risks, to address myself to Mr. Cromer. But though I conceive the parental tenderness of both to be equally deep-seated, I conceive that the father of Mr. Reresby Mordaunt should be of the two the better qualified to support—"

"For mercy's sake, my dear sir," cried Mordaunt, drawing his chair close to his visitor the moment he found that the matter in agitation regarded his son, "no apologies—no circumlocution! What is the matter? Speak out! I can bear anything better than suspense!"

"You can scarcely have failed to perceive, sir," resumed Milnward, "that, for some time past, a less respectful feeling than could be desired towards our excellent friend, Mr. Cromer, has prevailed at Deaswold?"

"Towards the Rector? I can't say I have noticed anything of the kind!" cried Mordaunt, becoming less excited as soon as the interest of the case seemed to shift itself to other shoulders than those of Reresby.

"Not when, three weeks ago, the church was nearly deserted on occasion of his doing duty?" inquired Milnward, gathering self-possession when he found his face and words less anxiously watched by the person he was addressing.

"I vaguely remember that the congregation was a thin one," replied his host. "But *that* might arise from caprice. The parishioners, perhaps, prefer a younger preacher."

"No, sir. Many of those who absented themselves were ashamed to look their pastor in the face, after the bitterness with which they had been canvassing his conduct, while others were desirous of marking, in the only way in their power, their personal disapproval of it."

"Why, what has my friend Jacob been doing?" inquired Mordaunt, beginning to hope that the mental consternation of his young visitor would bring forth only, like the mountain in labour, a *ridiculus mus*. "Were I required to point out a human being

in this world free from speck or blemish, it would be the worthy Rector of Deaswold."

"And you would do justly!" cried young Milnward, with warmth. "For there does not breathe a better Christian, a better man."

"In which conviction," resumed Mordaunt, "I confess I see nothing very afflicting in the defection of a few grumbling old blockheads; who, if St. Paul himself were to come and preach the gospel among them, would be trying to pick holes in his doctrines."

"It is not the *doctrines*, sir, of Mr. Cromer, with which the parish pretends to find fault," resumed Milnward.

"With what else, then, since his conduct is irreproachable?"

"*That*, sir, is the point in dispute. If blameless himself, he is accused of screening the misdeeds of others: and it is the serious apprehension I entertain that this charge may be brought home to him in some most painful and offensive manner, that determined me to confer with you upon the subject."

"At least, let me clearly understand what we are talking about," resumed the proprietor of Deasmarsh. "In the first place, *whose* evil-doings is poor Cromer supposed to have countenanced?"

"Before I venture to reply, sir," rejoined Milnward, respectfully, "permit me to assure you that my own opinion on the question is wholly neutral. The unfortunate circumstances which have given rise to so factious a spirit on the part of Mr. Cromer's parishioners, occurred before I entered upon my duties. From *him* I know nothing whatever on the subject: and from the high terms of panegyric in which, since his return to his duties, I have heard him speak of Mr. Reresby Mordaunt—"

"My son?" interrupted Mordaunt, again resuming his original interest in the debate.

"—convince me," continued Milnward, "that the reports which have given rise in the village to the blackest of inferences, are altogether false and calumnious."

"Reports involving my son Reresby?"

"And the daughter of my friend Mr. Cromer."

"Tu, tu, tu, tu!" cried Mordaunt, inexpressibly relieved. "Is *that*, my dear sir, the wonderful dilemma which has been lengthening your face for the last quarter of an hour, and frightened me half out of my wits? Set your mind at ease! A misconception—a blunder—an old wife's transposition of persons! There is nothing more, I promise you, between Miss Emma and my son, than between old Excellency Settringham, as they call him at Basinghill, and one of the prim Miss Moulseys!"

"I am heartily rejoiced to hear it, sir. There only remains for us to devise the surest means of checking the circulation of the slander before it extend from the village to the country, and perhaps attain in the end the fatal publicity of the newspaper press."

"Why, after all," rejoined his companion, unable to repress a smile at the monstrosity of nothings, in which the ignorance of the world of poor young Milnward seemed prone to indulge, "the worst they could say would be neither very injurious nor very hard of disapproval. Were the papers to go the length of announcing a marriage between the parties, nothing easier than to make them contradict it!"

"But neither the report nor the contradiction, I fear, would go far to re-establish Mr. Cromer in the esteem of his parishioners," said Milnward, gravely, shaking his head.

"Why, do you mean to say," cried Mordaunt, not a little diverted at what he conceived to be the pragmatism of the young curate, "that the Deaswold folks have deserted the church it is their duty to attend, merely because the Rector's daughter has been seen laughing and chatting occasionally with a fine young man, whose acquaintance would do honour to any girl in the kingdom?"

A sudden flush rose to the cheek of the reverend moralist, who remained coldly silent.

"Or that the farmers' wives are such confounded prudes," added Mordaunt, a little nettled, "as to fancy that a parson's daughter is not to open her eyes, ears, and lips, like other young women of her age?"

"I am not a man of the world, Mr. Mordaunt," replied Milnward, almost sternly. "But, even if ungoverned on such subjects by professional reserve, I should be of opinion that the unfortunate business we are discussing is such as ought not to be treated with levity. If, instead of meditating *contradiction* of the reports that your son is disposed to repair by marriage the offence offered to the honour of an old and respectable family, you were disposed to sanction his union with—"

"With Jacob Cromer's daughter?" impatiently interrupted Mordaunt. "I tell you, my dear sir, again and again, that, from first to last, you are under a mistake. There never was a question of love or marriage between these young people. On a first acquaintance, indeed, my son might be a little taken by Emma's pretty face and artless character. But there is nothing in such a girl to fix the affections of a young man of high pretensions and superior faculties, like my son."

"The more to be lamented that his conduct should have given rise to impressions so different," said Milnward, disapprovingly; "and if, in justice to Emma Cromer, he were to lower the pretensions you speak of—"

"In one, sir," cried Mordaunt, with angry abruptness—"the hand and heart of my son are otherwise disposed of."

"God's will be done!" was the pious rejoinder of his visitor. "I was in hopes that public atonement on *his* part might at least tend to the exonerating of my unfortunate friend."

"Without feeling myself called upon to enter more fully into my

family affairs, sir," resumed Mordaunt, out of patience, "permit me to observe that I see no possible call for exoneration on the part of my son!"

"Not after inveigling the unhappy girl (*child* I might almost call her, at the period her indiscretions began!) into clandestine meetings, out of reach of her father's protecting arm, out of reach of the decencies of home, in a lonely building, with only his own evil intentions to keep watch over her unguarded youth—"

"False—utterly false! You presume, sir, upon your sacred functions to come and insult me with an infernal falsehood!" cried Mordaunt, every pulse within him throbbing with indignation. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Milnward!" added he, in an humbled voice, on perceiving his young visitor rise hastily from his chair to quit the room, "but you are really trying me too far. Flesh and blood may not endure so foul a charge against one of the best-hearted and most gentlemanly young fellows in the world!"

Willingly accepting the apology of one whose blindness of paternal pride and tenderness was proverbial among his friends, the young clergyman patiently resumed his seat.

"It was because prepared for some such outburst of indignation, sir," said he, "that I hesitated to enter your doors for the purpose of addressing you on a subject so painful and so delicate. But you insisted on being enlightened!"

"But I am *not* enlightened. All you say tends only further to bewilder me!" cried Mordaunt. "I again earnestly entreat you, Mr. Milnward, to speak out! What is it you mean? What has induced you to bring forward this extraordinary charge against my son?"

"The indignation, sir, of the whole village of Deaswold. But that indignation has a deeper origin. I am grieved to say, sir, that the angry feelings existing against both young Mr. Mordaunt and the Rectory are mainly attributable to the evil instigations of Cromer Hall—"

"I could have sworn it!" interrupted Mordaunt, breathing more freely.

"In justice, however, to Mr. Cromer, I ought to state," added Milnward, "that the moment it was brought to his knowledge, by the testimony of an eye-witness, that his niece and your son held daily clandestine meetings at Deasmill, he proceeded straight to his brother, and warned him of the fact."

"The deuce he did!"

"But, blinded by simple-minded good faith, and implicit confidence in his child, the Rector expressed total disbelief, in terms that have produced an irreconcilable rupture between the two brothers."

"I was afraid," murmured Mordaunt, as though speaking to himself, "that Deasmarsh went for something in the animosity at present existing between them!"

"The Squire, it appears," continued his visitor, "has not scrupled to assert that his brother was cognizant, from the first, of all that has been going on between his daughter and your son; but that, in the hope of patching up a match between them,—in the hope of making a marriage indispensable on any terms,—he was content to close his eyes to the affair."

"Infamous, infamous! and as groundless as it is base!"

"So I am fully convinced—so I never hesitated to believe. The opinion, nevertheless, has gained ground. The Rector's obstinate adherence to *your* cause in opposition to his brother, whenever parish dissensions have arisen, has given colour, sir, to the impression of his subservience to the richest man in the district."

"I wish those who say so could witness the mulish obstinacy of my friend Jacob whenever (and the occasions are neither few nor far between) we differ on political questions! I sometimes accuse him of being (next to myself) the most pig-headed fellow in the county!"

"The intimacy apparent between you induces other notions in the village. Thanks to his brother's insinuations, his parishioners are convinced that he is prepared to go all lengths in the sacrifice of his principles and respectability to secure your favour. Farmer Richards, for a long time one of the warmest of his partisans, on finding him return the other day from London an advocate of free trade,—a convert to the well-known doctrines of Mr. Reresby Mordaunt,—exclaimed publicly in the vestry, that, if so weak on *one* point, he could believe all that had been reported; that the man who could sacrifice his country to propitiate a wealthy neighbour, would even sacrifice his daughter!"

"All this, I fear, is more serious than I at first supposed it," said Mordaunt, shaking his head. "Calumny is a fiendish imp, that shoots up into a giant while one's eyes are winking. To gratify the unbrotherly malice of one of the meanest of men, I am afraid more briars have been planted in the path of my poor friend Jacob than it will be altogether easy to root up."

"I trust," rejoined Milward, "he will have philosophy enough, or *better* than philosophy, to meet with patience whatever vexation may be inflicted on him by the bad spirit of the Deaswold people. But, though possessed of sufficient confidence in his daughter and respect for Mr. Reresby Mordaunt to regard with contempt the vile insinuations which have endeavoured to connect the testimony of Drewe the labourer with the melancholy event at Deasmill—"

"*What* event at Deasmill?" interrupted Mordaunt.

"The discovery of the dead infant in the Deas, adjoining the mill-works. I greatly fear, I say, that the mere fact of such a circumstance having been for a single moment supposed to inculpate the daughter to whom he is so fondly attached, may exercise a grievous influence over his health."

"By heaven and earth, this is too bad!" cried Mordaunt, start-

ing up, and with agitated footsteps pacing the room. "Have you really the courage to tell me in cool blood that you believe, or that any human being asserts, or has ever ventured to assert, the criminality of that poor innocent child at the Rectory, or to connect such an act as child-murder with the honourable name of my son?"

"If I fancied there existed the smallest *grounds* for such a charge, Mr. Mordaunt," gravely expostulated the young clergyman, "should I, think you, have hazarded the measure of this audience? No, sir! I do *not* believe it! I am convinced that the whole story is a foul and groundless calumny. But it is believed by *many*. The story was insinuated into my ear before I had been many days in Deaswold: and, at first, I treated it as a contemptible slander, likely to be speedily disproved by the discovery of the real delinquents. Unluckily, this was not the case; and on visiting Deasmill, for the purpose of sifting the matter, I found from the Clemsons that they had been subject to the most cruel accusations in consequence, according to *their* account, of evil reports emanating from Cromer Hall. Wherever I went, meanwhile, the scandal was beforehand with me. The whole village was in commotion; and, on the arrival of the Rector to do a day's duty, three weeks ago, I was afraid he could not but notice the altered deportment of his parishioners."

"I *did* think him out of spirits when he came to Deasmarsh," observed Mordaunt frankly; "but little suspected the cause!"

"He had probably received some personal slight," rejoined Milnward; "but certain am I that so outspoken a nature as his would have been unable to restrain its indignation a moment had he suspected its origin."

"I verily believe you!" rejoined Mordaunt, with a gesture indicative of his own irritation. "Though my grey hairs ought to keep cool my blood, and though, in my youth, of no very irascible temperament, I promise you it requires some effort on my part not to make the best of my way, this very moment, to Cromer Hall, and call to account the sneaking scoundrel who has maligned his own flesh and blood as well as vilified my son!"

"I fear, sir, the report has by this time transpired too widely for even *him* to repair the mischief he has done!" said Milnward, rising to take leave.

"And what then do you suggest by way of antidote to the evil?" cried Mr. Mordaunt, with some hauteur. "You can scarcely have taken so strong a step as to alarm a father's heart on such a subject, Mr. Milnward, without having remedial measures to propose?"

"My interest in the subject," rejoined his visitor, "is of course limited to anxiety for the peace and welfare of my friends at the Rectory; whom I conceive to be victims to the envious, jealous spirit of their kinsman at Cromer Hall. But, were the case my own, Mr. Mordaunt—that is, were I situated as you are—I would not

stir a step in it previous to consulting with my son. He *ought* to be apprised of what is going on. He ought to be acquainted with the injurious conduct of John Cromer."

"True enough!" interrupted Mordaunt in a lower voice. "For a thousand reasons, he should be warned of *that*!"

"And when he has informed you, in return, what portion of Drewe's testimony is founded on fact, so as to afford you exact data on which to defend his cause, no time should be lost in bringing the matter to the strictest scrutiny and disproof."

"I will be off to town to-morrow by the early train," cried Mordaunt, at once adopting the idea.

"And why not, my dear sir, to-night? Why not start for London by the train that is about to take me into Hertfordshire?"

"Because, most unluckily, the Rector and his daughter are engaged to dine with me to-day; and should poor Jacob have become alive, in the interim, to the ill-will of which he is the object, he might attribute my sudden absence to ungraciousness."

"You are right—quite right, sir," said the departing guest, preparing to quit the room. "*His* feelings ought to be our first object. And now that my most painful duty is accomplished, suffer me take leave by thanking you for your kindness during my stay in this part of the country; a kindness that would be not a little increased could I obtain a promise that, should anything further transpire concerning this painful affair, you will kindly set my anxieties at rest."

The promise being readily given, Milnward, with a heavy heart, bade adieu to the spot where his ministry had prospered so much less fully than he could have wished; leaving Mordaunt to fulfil the duty that hung heavy on his shoulders, of playing the courteous host to Emma and her father. To accost poor Jacob, indeed, though a sad, was not a difficult task—so thoroughly did his worthy neighbour sympathize in his situation. But at present he felt ill at ease with Jacob's daughter. His mind was not fully made up. Though incapable of a bad or dishonourable action, Reresby was not proof against the weaknesses of his age. The example of foreign countries might, moreover, have relaxed the principles of morality imbibed amid the rigid decencies of his early home; and his father did not feel *quite* secure that his handsome son might not have dealt more lightly with his bright-eyed and unguarded girl than became either their relative position or his engagements with her cousin. On the morrow, he should satisfy himself by a single inquiry of his son. One word of Reresby's would resolve him. Meanwhile, the unsuspecting girl who dined at Deasmarsh, and talked so glibly of London and its pleasures, was a grievous stumbling-block in the way of the distressed father.

CHAPTER XXIII.

I never tempted her with word too large,
 But as a brother to a sister show'd
 Bashful sincerity and comely love.

SHAKESPEARE.

"My dear father!" cried Reresby, starting up from his breakfast table next morning, to welcome one who, wise enough to eschew at that pleasant season of the year the stony ways of the great metropolis, was indeed an unexpected guest. "What in the world brings you to town? Nothing is amiss, I trust, at home?"

"Nothing, nothing!" cried the bustling country gentleman, who seemed to introduce into the London bachelor's paradise a wholesome whiff from the far-off fields and forests, and whose premeditated reserve, till satisfied of the irreproachability of his son, gave way the very moment he looked upon his face. "I am in town on business, my dear boy, about which we will talk when you have given me a cup of tea and a slice of tongue. I was afraid, as I came along, that your breakfast hour might be over. I was afraid you would be out."

"My breakfast hour is over, though, luckily, not my breakfast!" cried Reresby, glancing at the clock on his chimney-piece, after again heartily shaking his hand with his visitor. "But we did not divide this morning till half-past four. A glorious majority! Ninety-four, instead of the eighty-three on which we reckoned!"

And in a moment, in spite of himself, Mordaunt was deep in details of the debate. "*Who* had spoken, *who* answered, *who* distinguished himself?" The instincts of the public man were aroused. He forgot that there was a Deaswold rectory in the world! For full half an hour they talked of nothing but politics. At the end of half an hour, Mordaunt saw in the young man before him only the zealous servant of the country—only the illustrator of his name—only the son who was to work his way to Canningship. To tax him with a crime—to tax him even with an act of folly—would have been sacrilege. Ere, however, the prospects of the kingdom were half discussed by two ardent patriots, who talked not for victory, but mutual enlightenment, Reresby's servant brought in a note which was opened with a degree of nonchalance proclaiming it, though addressed in a female hand, to be of a nature to fear nothing from his father's presence.

"Lady Barton's servant waits for an answer, sir," said the valet; and after a hasty perusal, Reresby returned a verbal reply.

"My compliments to Lady Barton, and I will endeavour to send her, in the course of the day, the order she requires. One of those tiresome women," added he, turning, as the servant left the room, to his father (who, the moment the name of the widow of

the late celebrated was mentioned, lapsed into severity and sternness of countenance)—“one of those tiresome women who are always pestering one for admissions to the ladies’ gallery at the House of Commons; which, containing only accommodation for a dozen persons, is sure to be bespoken.”

Mr. Mordaunt finished his tea in silence.

“And all for the affectation of pretending to listen to a debate which interests them about as much as the muster-roll of a regiment!” resumed the young member; “inasmuch as their cackling is said to render the adjoining gallery insupportable to people who go there to listen instead of talk! However, I must procure Lady Barton what she asks for!” added he, in a more cheerful tone. “I have nothing to refuse to the sister-in-law of Jacob Cromer, the aunt of dear little Emma!”

This was indeed speaking out! Mr Mordaunt’s heart steeled itself at once!

“While they were in town, then,” said he, “you renewed the intimacy which appeared to have a little fallen off at Deasmarsh?”

“Naturally! In London, Emma Cromer was my *payse*! In London, Emma served to bring all Northamptonshire before my eyes!”

“And among the other spots of Northamptonshire which she serves to recall,” demanded his father, almost rivalling the frown of Olympian Jove in the stern knitting of his brows, “pray do you include *Deasmill*?”

“Indeed I do, my dear father!” cried Reresby, concluding from the significance of his father’s manner that poor Magdalen must be in his mind. “Officious persons, I see, have told you all! But they have only anticipated my purpose. I pledged myself to Emma before she quitted London, that I would make a clean breast of it; and that you should have the means of judging the peculiar delicacy of our situation.”

“And after *that*,” cried Mordaunt, thinking aloud, “she had the audacity to come with a smiling face and dine with his mother and sister!”

“And why not, my dear father?” cried Reresby, a little hurt. “No blame can be imputed to *her*! *Her* conduct, God knows, has been everything that is frank and generous!”

“Frank and generous!” again ejaculated the elder Mordaunt, shrugging his shoulders. “Ay, the frankness and generosity which a magistrate’s bench rewards with hard labour or a solitary cell!”

“I never before heard you illiberal, father!” cried the thunder-struck Reresby. “I hardly know you this morning!”

“And I hardly know my son!” retorted the elder Mordaunt, deeply affected. “That you were rash—that you were indiscreet—that you were warmer-blooded than prudence admits, Reresby,

I was fully aware. But I would have perilled my soul that you would rather forfeit your own, than bring down in sorrow to the grave the gray hairs of a good man like Jacob Cromer, or break the heart of such a girl as his niece!"

"My father pleading the cause of Magdalen?" exclaimed Reresby, in mingled joy and surprise.

"As a matter of personal feeling," gravely resumed his father. "I was certainly desirous that you should attach yourself otherwise than to the daughter of the man of all England I most despise and detest. But, having done so, and inveigled her innocent affections, so that I am told by those who know her she has never lifted up her head since you left the country, and is in some danger of following her sisters to an untimely grave—"

"My poor dear Magdalen!" cried Reresby, clasping his hands.

"Having, I say," continued old Mordaunt, "wrought all this mischief to the poor young creature, trust me, Reresby, that, among the many by whom your cruel duplicity will be condemned, first and foremost will be your father!"

"My cruel *duplicity* towards her!" cried his son. "When I have acted only in reluctant obedience to your commands!"

"How, sir! you presume to ascribe to *me* your infamous levity of conduct?"

Concluding that his father must allude to his attentions to Lady Belvedere (which had probably transpired at Deasmarsh through the giddy prattling of Emma), Reresby looked foolish, and was silent. But Mr. Mordaunt fixed his eyes so steadily upon him while waiting a reply, that he at length managed to stammer forth, "I assure you, sir, it was a mere flirtation! my intentions were never serious. At *my* age, surely there is no great crime in a *passetemps* of that description?"

"*Passetemps*, indeed!" reiterated his indignant father, swelling with scorn. "Always a French epithet when vice or folly is to be disguised! But let me tell you that, if you venture to show your face at Deasmarsh, sir, you may chance to find that Northamptonshire bumpkins entertain stout English notions on such points! Already, thanks to your '*passetemps*,' they have insulted their pastor and all but desecrated the house of God. Nay, thanks to your '*passetemps*,' the girl herself is exposed to the scoffs and scorns of the whole village of Deaswold!"

"Magdalen?" exclaimed the young man, a little astonished at the *ricochet*.

"Magdalen? No! the graceless baggage for whom you have abandoned her!"

Now, though "graceless baggage" was an epithet which, however severe, might be applied without much injustice to the Countess of Belvedere, the word "girl" was a puzzler!

"I am beginning to suspect, my dear father," cried Reresby, "that we do not quite understand each other! Tell me distinctly,

what it is you disapprove in my conduct; or whether I have the smallest hope that you will relent in my favour, so as to advance the epoch of my marriage with Magdalen Cromer?"

Thus clearly apostrophized, Mr. Mordaunt's explanations became equally lucid. All he had heard from Milnward was speedily related; and, to his joy, the indignation of Reresby, as he listened, more than kept pace with his own.

"Poor Emma! poor kind-hearted little Emma!" cried he. "Hard indeed that *she* should be the victim of my folly; she, who might have vindicated herself by a single word! For, when talking over with her in London my engagement to her cousin, she frankly owned that, thanks to the restlessness of girlish curiosity (she called it curiosity, but I suspect that a *little* spice of woman's jealousy mingled in the leaven) she had discovered, very soon after they commenced, my clandestine meetings with Magdalen; and that, on one occasion, enraged at our want of confidence in her, she was on the point of entering Clemson's cottage to confound us!"

"She appears to be a generous, warm-hearted girl," said the elder Mordaunt, using the very epithet he had resented when applied by his son. "The more reason that we should lose no time in extricating her from the abominable aspersions her uncle has been the means of drawing upon her head."

"But what is to be *done*?" inquired the young member. "Her father, thank goodness,—that is, thank *his* goodness,—is too excellent to have so much as listened to the imputations devised by the Squire. As regards *him* she needs no vindication. And as to those confounded fellows at Deaswold (who, I suppose, have scarcely yet recovered the shock of their corn-law defeat), *our* assuring them that Miss Emma Cromer is as pure as unsunned snow, that she never set foot in Deasmill in her life, except to carry essence of mustard to old Clemson for the cure of his rheumatism, and that, as to the little victim found in the Deas, it was doubtless the offspring of one of their own disreputable daughters, would have only the effect of establishing their contrary belief! What *fact* have we to adduce in answer to the calumnies of the Squire? It would hardly do to have the Honourable Member for Castle Dangan making an affidavit before poor Jacob, or Sir William Settringham, that he is not so great a blackguard as represented! For though I have suspicions, *and strong ones*, respecting the child and its murderers, I have no positive evidence to bring forward."

"*Suspicious*!" cried Mordaunt, the instinct of the magistrate suddenly flaring up.

"*That* point, my dear father, we will discuss hereafter. What I would first determine is the surest and speediest mode of vindicating the character of Emma Cromer."

"You seem to find it easier, my sapient son, to unravel the mighty maze of political economy than see an inch beyond your

nose!" cried his father, endeavouring to rally his spirits. "There is clearly but one mode of accomplishing this desirable object, which is—"

Reresby stood still to listen.

"By proceeding straight to Cromer Hall, and demanding of its caiffiff of an owner the hand of his daughter."

At that moment Mr. Mordaunt's looks were better to be understood than his words. Reresby saw that he was in earnest, for his eyes were glistening with emotion.

"And you would make such a sacrifice of your prejudices, my dearest father? you actually authorize such a measure?"

"Actually!—to-morrow, if you choose! I owe it to the son I am so justly proud of,—I owe it to my worthy friend the Rector,—I owe it to the merry-hearted little girl who has been so shamefully dealt with, as well as to the charming one of whom my anxious inquiries have been able to find out nothing but good, and whom I hope soon to fold to my heart as a daughter!"

In a moment Reresby was in his arms, and both were silent.

"And, above all," added the deeply moved father as soon as he could recover his utterance, "I owe it to that Almighty Being who has surrounded my path with the blessings of life, and will surely exact of one who has been made so happy that he render others happy in return."

No counter-argument was necessary. Mordaunt spoke like an oracle; and, grateful and overjoyed, his son had already *almost* forgiven the Squire those vile and gratuitous slanders which had proved the means of bringing about an event so little hoped for.

"I scarcely dare mention just now the name of the Freshleys, my dear father," added the happy young man, "lest it should bring before your mind's eye the handsome house in town, and good establishment, and submissive little wife, with which it once appeared connected. But let it be some comfort to you to know that there is still a chance of Burtmill's being enjoyed by your grandchildren. I had a letter yesterday from Tom, in which, though he speaks much of his examination, he talks so much more of the misery of finding himself a hundred miles distant from the engine-chimneys which most people are so glad to escape from, that—"

"Stuff and nonsense!" interrupted Mordaunt, with a good-humoured smile. "Do you suppose I don't know all about it? For what purpose did you fancy I packed off your brother into Lancashire last Christmas? I should have found it twice as hard a matter to forgive your infatuation for the daughter of the Squire, had I not known your brother to be far better suited than yourself both to Claudia and her uncle. Nothing further on the subject, however, if you please, till after the examination, for when we come to the scratch I am afraid my friend Freshley will be sadly disappointed at having to put up with second-best; and Tom will

be all the more thought of at Burtmill if he present himself as a suitor sinking under university honours."

"You really think, my dear father, that there exist places and people still influenced by such barren laurels?"

"What think you of Settringham Abbey? What think you makes Sir William look upon that learned oaf of his as a Solon, but his senior wranglership and the F.R.S. appended to his name? It was a source of indescribable bitterness to even the Melfonts that their son George should have stopped so far short of the distinctions achieved by a certain Reresby Mordaunt, who wore no gold tassel to his cap."

"In that case I pardon the besotment of Burtmill!"

"*Besotment* is a severe word. We prize our salvers and flagons the more for having the Hall mark upon them in proof that they are of standard value. And trust me, my dear boy, that no man, whether top-sawyer or bottom, whether destined to a curate's wooden settle or the woolsack, gets on the worse in the world for having taken a high degree. Besides, if Tom have the good fortune to secure this excellent match, no reason that he should not hereafter figure in parliament, and ensure double honour to our name."

By these arguments Reresby was overjoyed to perceive that the sacrifice of feeling meditated by his father gave him less pain than at one time might have been expected. People undergoing a deep mortification have seldom courage to look to the bright side of things. Much of his philosophy, however, was attributed by his son to immersion in the civilizing stream of that vast metropolis where self dwindles into a molecule.

It became the policy of Reresby, therefore, to keep his father in town, and in his excellent intentions, till some irrecoverable step had been taken; and, on pretence of wanting his company while he went in search of the order for the House of Commons which had so curiously led the way to a stormy discussion ending in so glorious a rainbow, Reresby contrived to drag his father where he was sure to fall in the way of Sir John Grovynor Grovynor, who not only insisted on detaining his country neighbour in London to join a dinner-party that day at his house, but carried him off in his brougham (looking, as Reresby saucily observed, like a double-kernelled nut), to visit half a dozen patentees of new inventions, calculated to smoothe the ways of this world of ruts and inequalities.

When left alone with his happy thoughts, the bosom of the enraptured young man became almost too narrow to contain them. Since his first encounter with Magdalen in the meadows where Don and Donna pounced upon her as a fit object for the game-bag, never had he felt so much in love. All he had recently heard from Emma of her cousin's sufferings for his sake—of her gentle and endearing qualities, and the sad life she was leading;—and, above all, all he had seen in London of the wilfulness and

recklessness of other women, conspired to bring out, with more than its original beauty and freshness, the lovely image imprinted on his heart. Like Lady Madrepore's autograph of John Trade-scent, the faded characters arose in all their pristine distinctness when exposed to chemical action. He seemed to tread on air. His bosom's lord sat as lightly on its throne as Taglioni on a daisy. Lucky that the grand questions of the session were at an end, and the orators of the day left to chew the cud of sweet and bitter laurels; for, in his present mood, the honourable member for Castle Dangan ran some danger of addressing "Mr. Speaker" as "my beloved Magdalen!"

The prospect of belonging to the Cromer Hall family was, indeed, something of a drawback. The narrow-minded Squire (a better man than whom might have been carved out of grit-stone), the Mrs. Glasse of a mother, whose storeroom was her petty universe, and the coarse unlettered brothers, of whose ruffianly habits much worse was known to Reresby than to his father, were certainly untempting kindred. But, after passing them in review,

came wandering by

A spirit like an angel;—

an angel whom it would be happiness indeed to translate to a more genial sphere. After all, it was better perhaps that her family should be so detestable. Her happiness in wedlock would be all the more complete from having nothing to regret among those she left behind at Cromer Hall. His optimism; in short, was *optissime*.

On joining Lady Mary Grovynor Grovynor's dinner-party, poor Reresby seemed like one inspired. His lips were touched with fire. Darting with brilliant eloquence

From grave to gay, from lively to severe,

he so electrified the company by high spirits that passed for wit, and fluency that sounded like sense, and, above all, by resuming the debate of the preceding night with a ripeness of humour that "Punch" might have envied (and which Cad Rowlandson made his fortune for the remainder of the season by imitating wherever he dined, about as ably as one of Teniers' pictures is copied on the pipeclay bowl of a tobacco-pipe!), that Sir John Grovynor Grovynor sat revolving it in his mind whether a patent could not be taken out for him, or at least his good things rendered copyright.

"Why have you not been in Belgrave Square to-day?" inquired Sir Herbert Glynne, snatching him by the sleeve as he attempted to flit through the crowd with which Lady Mary Grovynor Grovynor was in the habit of prolonging through a whole evening the tediousness of her dinner. "Lady Bel. was in hopes that, now Doctor and Miss Primrose are gone back to Wakefield, Squire Thornhill might fall once more to the share of Lady Blarney and Miss Carolina Wilhelmina Amelia Skeggs!"

"My father is in town, and I have had worlds of things to do to-day," replied Reresby. "But, if you see Lady Belvedere, pray tell her I will call upon her, if possible, before I leave town. I should be grieved that she thought me negligent."

"Don't distract yourself on her account," said his friend, surprised at his unusual unction. "I don't believe her ladyship to be in immediate danger of prussic acid. Indeed, seeing that you have not called these three days, and finding it a bore to have many-buttoned pages sent after me with triangular notes, inquiring what has become of my friend Mr. Mordaunt, I put it into her head yesterday that Dick Lovell was going into a decline for her sake,—a bait so readily swallowed that I am not without hopes of seeing Knightsbridge and Sheet Street barracks cut out the Houses of Lords and Commons."

"But what had Lord Richard done to you, that you should bring such a corvée down in judgment on him?"

"*Done?* What has he done since he was born but convert full bottles into empty ones, and, being squeamish,

Damn the climate like a lord?

However, if not amusing in himself, he will be the cause of amusement to others. In the first place, think of the fun of seeing Mark Trevor playing *violino secondo* in a deep-drawn sigh, and of Lady Bel's amazement at finding that the Shadow will be a lost Shadow unless she can find in her heart 'lodgings for *two* single gentlemen!'

"Too bad, too bad!" cried Reresby, though laughing heartily at what he condemned.

"Above all, think of the *potage* that will be served up in Belgrave Square when my charming cousin (who invariably extends her hospitalities to the *alentours* of her reigning Romeo) intermingles the cornets of the Household Brigade with Fauconberg's sages and poets, who have not yet deserted the establishment! How each faction will wonder at the other! Since Pizarro's expedition astonished the weak minds of the Mexicans, nothing like their mutual amazement! But what are you in such a confounded hurry to get away for?" cried Sir Herbert, on finding it likely that, from his friend's struggles for self-extrication, his button would remain in his hand.

"I am looking for a pair."

"For the remainder of the session?"

"*That*, alas! is past praying for;—but till Wednesday next. I have promised to accompany my father back to Deasmarsh."

"And is it quite certain that you cannot continue to keep him and yourself in town another day?" anxiously inquired Sir Herbert.

"For what purpose? On the contrary, I am dying to get into Northamptonshire!"

"To the feet of Miss Cromer?"

"To the feet of Miss Cromer," replied Reresby, not thinking it

necessary to remind his friend that there were more Miss Cromers in the parish of Deaswold than the one whom the Countess of Belyedere honoured with her jealousy. And Sir Herbert, whose object in wishing to keep the Mordaunts in town was simply to obtain an answer, ere he lost sight of them, to the letter in which he had ventured to explain to Matilda all his misconceptions, all his enlightenment, all his penitence, and above all his deep and devoted attachment, was forced to keep his own counsel.

If the surmises expounded by the Rector's daughter were correct, who knows but he might be invited to accompany the father and son to the happy spot that seemed about to be converted into the temple of Hymen? Who knows but, in total defiance of Lindley Murray, the superlative might be made to admit of comparison, and *two* happiest of men make their appearance by the self-same mail-train at Deasmarsh Park?

CHAPTER XXIV.

L'intelligence ne trouve qu'en elle même l'aliment de sa vie. Sois juste et forte. Vis en toi même et cherche ce qui ne périt point. Tu ne trouveras pas la paix dans les choses. Cherche la dans ton cœur. La force est la loi de la nature: la puissance, c'est la volonté: l'énergie dans les peines est meilleure que l'apathie dans les voluptés.

MANUEL DE PSEUSOPHANES.

GREAT as had been the satisfaction of the Rector and his daughter on their way home to Deaswold, and intense their delight in feasting their eyes once more on the fair face of the country, still more elate were the spirits of Mordaunt and his son while pursuing the selfsame road. Search England over, and you would not have found two happier people—the father from having just obtained a glorious victory over himself, the son from knowing that he held in his hand a pass-key to the garden of Eden. Happiness and the object of his love were about to become his own for ever.

The blood of the Man of Capital must have been "snowbroth," indeed, had it not flowed the freer while traversing the prosperous and influential railroad devised by his spirit of enterprise and forwarded by his activity, towards a district which he had rescued from stagnation so as to constitute himself its second providence, —a district where, under his auspices, swampy fields had become a noble park; unwholesome hovels, commodious cottages; discontented labourers, thriving workmen; and, above all, mischievous and savage urchins, well conditioned, well-taught children, promising a better order of things hereafter.

For, if there still lingered sufficient moral malaria in the village of Deaswold to engender infanticide and slander, it was thanks to the class called into existence by the sordid supineness of the Squire, who had refused to institute schools for his tenantry, lest

their helotism should grow weary of slavery, and those who learned to read forget to work.

But at the present moment, when the warm heart of the prosperous man was learning to contemplate the bright home of his creation in a new light, as the cradle of a future generation, a spot where he should behold the happiness of his excellent son perfected, and roses springing among his laurels, no wonder that his heart overflowed with a double measure of milk and honey.

He had been slow to adopt Magdalen; but, once adopted, she had become at once a child of his own. He longed to tell her so. He longed to tell her how he had tried to discover flaws in the "one entire and perfect chrysolite" so treasured by his son, and tried in vain. He longed to ask her forgiveness for not having loved her at first sight, and overlooked that the Juliet of his Romeo was born a Capulet. Great excuses were owing to her, as well as long arrears of happiness; and both should be bestowed with compounding interest and an ungrudging hand.

As to the young lover, to follow the vagaries of *his* imagination, to portray the wild confusion of joyful presages flitting like humming birds through his fancy, would be like endeavouring to paint the rainbow—a task defying the palette of Rubens himself. The idea of clasping to his heart his beloved Magdalen with the sanction of *his* father and her own, and repaying by the most public deference of homage his sense of the injury her good name had incurred for his sake, made him fancy that even a speed of thirty miles an hour was as slow as Settringham Abbey. Like Imogen, he wanted a "horse with wings," to bear him where he might feast his eyes once more upon the fairest of human faces—the face whose smiles were all his own. It might have amused an indifferent spectator to hear the father and son playing with each other at didactic, when their hearts were overbrimming with boyish glee.

"Admit, my dear father," said Reresby, "that I earned my present happiness by the implicit obedience I showed you when driven from Deasmarsh last winter, like Adam out of Paradise, without so much as a farewell look."

"As I had then reason to trust that the engagement might still be broken off," replied his father, "my harshness was meant for kindness—kindness to *you*, and justice to *her*."

"Admit at least, then," persevered Reresby, determined to be praised, "that I deserve some credit for having settled down at once to business on my arrival in London, instead of letting grow my beard, or playing the despairing Orlando, or sending to the devil the constituency which had sent *me* to parliament."

"Are you *quite* sure that the smiles of celebrity did not a little outshine, just then, those of Miss Magdalen Cromer?" was his father's arch rejoinder. "Nay, don't defend yourself *too* vehemently, or I shall feel sure of having hit home. At all events, I

perceive that the ill effects of an atmosphere, apt at first to make people dizzy, have thoroughly worn off. Whatever may have been the case in May, before the great letters and Lady Belvedere had lost their magic power—"Well, well," cried he, interrupting himself, when he saw his son out of countenance, "let us say no more about it. All is right *now*, and Sir Proteus has found his way back to his *true* love. And, by the way, *à propos* to the fair Silvia, pray tell me, my dear boy, whether you ever happened to hear my daughter-in-law say whether she had a fancy for sapphires. I was carried yesterday to a vanity-shop by Lady Mary double-G (as our friend Glynne calls her) to look out for a bracelet to carry back to Matilda, and so, to save time and trouble, I even made a double purchase. Now I have two daughters, I must learn, you know, to buy in couples. Having snatched a sly glance now and then at church at Magdalen's beautiful dark hair, I flatter myself I have chosen what will become her."

What joy to hear his father already talking in such a strain! In time, how fond and proud would he not become of the beautiful and blameless being devoted to the happiness of his son!

"I cannot help anticipating some amusement," said he, on finding his father disposed to pass so lightly over the disagreeables and difficulties of the case, "from witnessing the sudden *ratting* of the Squire, and the ease with which wealth, so abhorrent in his eyes, will lose its offence when connected with the mighty dynasty of Cromer. He is just the man to become as cringing and sycophantic as he has been hitherto brutal."

"Don't talk of *him* if you wish me to remain happy and comfortable!" rejoined his father with a sigh. "If your dear Magdalen had only been Jacob's daughter instead of his, I should not have a wish ungratified in the world. It will cost me, I own, a grievous pang to make friendly overtures to Mr. Cromer, of Cromer Hall; though, like yourself, I suspect the bait will be greedily snapped at."

In spite of so many interesting points to supply topics of conversation for the travellers, the last few stations made their appearance slowly; but when at length the Deasmarsh woods, looming in the horizon, met the eyes of Reresby and his father, just where they had appeared like harbingers of home to the parson and the parson's daughter, their hearts became too full to say a word.

"Is my carriage waiting?" was Mordaunt's hasty inquiry on stepping from the train at the Darley station, without reflecting that he had afforded no intimation of the probability of his arrival. And the answer he received of—"No, sir, you are not expected. Miss Mordaunt brought a parcel addressed to you in London, to go by the three o'clock train, and seemed so anxious about its going, that I fancy it contained letters." Additional reason for jumping into a fly and making the best of their way home, instead of the pleasant walk they had originally planned.

"How lovely and how tranquil the place looks!" cried Reresby,

as the fly-b'y put his stout nag to its fullest trot, after passing the West Lodge gates, in honour of conveying through their fine domain the grandest folks of the neighbourhood. "How famously well the plantations have got on this summer! How green it will appear to Magdalen, after the drought and nakedness of Cromer Hall!"

To render the pleasant surprise of his unexpected visit still greater to his mother and sister, he proposed, as they approached the house, to dismiss the fly, the coming wheels of which would be premonitory, and make their entrance by the garden front, through the pleasure grounds; into which opened the saloon where, in summer time, the family spent their evenings. But scarcely had Reresby caught sight of the room and its occupants, when he repented his project, and would fain have retraced his steps to traverse the hall in the usual way. Something was sorely amiss! Matilda sat bathed in tears, with her mother leaning fondly over her chair. Having seized his father by the arm with the intention of warning him of the state of the case, poor Reresby, whose heart had been previously beating with joyous emotions, found no voice to express his uneasiness.

"Wait a moment, and let *me* go forward and announce you," cried his father, unwilling to startle those who appeared in such deep affliction. And the moment he entered the room, his son could discern the "Thank God, you are come!" which accompanied the affectionate embraces of both mother and daughter. "I am not only come, but have brought Reresby with me!" said he, wisely coming to the point at once. And almost before the words were pronounced, Matilda had dried her eyes and darted out upon the lawn, to bring in the welcome guest. Great, however, as was their joy at seeing him, more especially as both his aspect and his father's announced that their errand was satisfactory, neither Mrs. Mordaunt nor her daughter could conceal the distress of mind under which they laboured.

"No bad news of Tom?" inquired Mordaunt, in tones so low that he seemed afraid to let the words come out of his mouth. And when his wife replied at once that she "had heard nothing from Cambridge," he glanced round the room as much as to say, "Then are you not ashamed of crying? Is it not well with all whom your soul loveth?"

"We wrote to you, dear papa, by the evening train," said Matilda.

"So I heard, my dear, at the station."

"Not at all expecting you to-night," added his wife, "I was in hopes my letter would hurry you down."

"Why, what has been the matter here?" said her husband, anxiously.—"*Here*, nothing! But sad, sad news at the Rectory."

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed Mordaunt, while his son seemed already preparing to hasten off and afford whatever aid might be wanting.

"Our worthy friend Jacob Cromer is ill—*seriously* ill!"

"He was perfectly well the day he dined here!"

"Events have occurred since, which have smitten him to the dust."

"My dear wife, you are keeping me on tenter-hooks!" remonstrated the breathless Mordaunt.

"Only because I hardly know how to word all I have to explain," replied Mrs. Mordaunt, glancing at her daughter and son. A moment's reflection on the imminence of the danger, however, strengthened her mind and relieved her scruples.

"I suspect you are aware," she resumed, "though you never confided the fact to *me*, that for some time past the most infamous reports have prevailed in the village and neighbourhood—"

"About poor little Emma? I know it, my dear! But certain explanations of a very agreeable nature, which my son and I are about to make to you, will happily put an end to such vile injustice."

"Put an end to it? Heaven be praised! But no! we must misunderstand each other. On such a subject, *no* explanations could be agreeable."

"I allude," resumed her husband, "to certain meetings held between the young gentleman who now stands opposite you with a face as pale as ashes, at a place called Deasmill, not a thousand miles from hence, and a certain young lady of the name of Cromer—"

"She *was* then in the habit of meeting you at Mrs. Clemson's?" cried Matilda, turning in consternation towards her brother, at so unexpected a confirmation of the slanders in circulation.

"Magdalen,—not Emma!"

"The young lady of Cromer Hall?" exclaimed Mrs. Mordaunt, aghast.

"Even so, my dear," replied her husband. "The agreeable news I have to tell you is, that I have given my consent to a marriage between your son and a charming girl, in whom you must forget that you see the daughter of the lord of the manor. I have already forgotten it."

Warmly did the fond mother extend her arms in congratulation to her firstborn. Disapproval of what had been sanctioned by her husband was out of the question. All she could think of at that moment was, that her dear Reresby—her distinguished son—was about to establish himself in life.

"But surely," said her husband, the first to extend his sympathies beyond the narrow circle of home, "surely this false report has not so preyed on the mind of my good friend Jacob, in the course of a couple of days, as to render him seriously ill?"

"The error which caused one of the cousins to be taken for the other, by Mr. Cromer's labourers (who, one would think, might have been readily distinguished between them, except that they probably regarded it as *impossible* for one so closely kept as the

Squire's daughter to escape from home) is by no means the worst feature of the case. The brothers, as you are aware, have not spoken for months; and Jacob's political conversion, and the brilliant success in public life (if I may say so before him) of Reresby, have tended of late to aggravate the Squire into still bitterer animosity. From what I am able to gather, there is nothing that has not been advanced by the elder brother, and echoed by his brutal son, against the Rector and his daughter, to whosoever would lend an ear to their abuse. Two days ago, however, at a meeting of Protectionists that took place at Basinghill under the auspices of Aristobulus Settringham, he hazarded these aspersions in the most public manner. After alluding to the refusal to call an anti-league meeting at Deaswold, which he was pleased to attribute to our influence, he added that, with two resident magistrates in the parish, its justice business was worse done than in any other in the county; seeing that they played into each other's hands, and that what the one said, the other would swear to."

"But this regards *me* as much as Jacob," said Mordaunt gravely; and already Reresby trembled at the idea of new insults offered to his father by Cromer Hall.

"Ay, but it was at the heart of Jacob, and not yours, the deadly aim was levelled," added Mrs. Mordaunt; "for he proceeded to declare that, though you were in full possession of facts concerning the infant found drowned in the Deas, which would send to the gallows a young woman who had still the audacity to show herself among honest men's daughters as though she were not a wanton and a murderess, you stifled the charge and suffered the criminal to sneak out of the county, only lest the shadow of the crime should darken your own door-sill!"—

"By Heavens, I will make the fellow eat his words before he's a day older!" cried Mordaunt, shaking his clenched hand in uncontrollable exasperation at this infamous accusation; and, by the troubled countenance of Reresby, it was easy to perceive the difficulty he found in restraining similar indications of rage.

"At any other moment than the present," added Mrs. Mordaunt, unwilling to excite further resentment, yet painfully aware that the *whole* truth ought to be disclosed to her husband and son, "I am convinced that, saving among the class from which he appears to derive information, his labourers and servants, Mr. Cromer would not have obtained so much as a hearing for his insinuations. But for the last few weeks political animosities have run so high in this county, and more especially in this neighbourhood, that a few of his auditors who fancied themselves aggrieved by the triumph of free trade were disposed to believe any harm or wickedness of its apostles. I grieve to add that this man's slanderous hints did not receive the rebuke we had a right to expect."

"On the contrary," interposed Matilda, her voice thrilling with indignation, "many applauded, and *all* approved!"

"Yet I *ought* to have friends at Basinghill," mused Mordaunt. "The railroad has avowedly doubled the value of land there; and the village school-houses were erected at my cost."

"What considerations of gratitude or duty, my dear father, are ever found to weigh against party virulence?" demanded Reresby. "The monopolists would, I verily believe, burn, *not* in effigy, but in the flesh, every living being that has assisted in knocking off the last rivet of our feudal chains."

"To do the Basinghill people justice," rejoined his sister, "Mr. Cromer won chiefly on their minds by one of those plausible pieces of claptrap, which—to our shame, or honour, be it spoken—are apt to touch the chord of every human heart. In attacking the equity of my father and his brother, he declared that, had *he* been the examining magistrate in the affair of Deasmill, instead of stifling inquiry as *they* have done, he would have sifted the matter honestly to the bottom, even though it involved the credit, nay, the very life, of a child of his own."

"He said so, did he?" said Mordaunt, drawing his lips closer together.—"Good!—The words may still be brought home to him! The business is not yet at rest."

A single glance of Reresby's anxious eyes towards his father seemed to require further explanation!—But Mrs. Mordaunt was already resuming her narrative.

"Do not fancy, my dear husband," said she, "that *such* words were the worst uttered by Mr. Cromer! What I have told you is a mere preliminary to proceedings which have struck, I fear, a death-blow to our poor friend at the Rectory!—After the Basinghill meeting, the Squire returned home, on foot, followed by two or three of his tenants, and accompanied by several persons from the Northampton side of the county, whom he had induced to attend the meeting: among others, Vickers, the attorney, who has been the chief instigator of his hostilities towards *us*; *all* heated by wrangling over party matters, and the refreshment they had taken."

"Or, in other words," interrupted her son, "their heads hot with drink, and their hearts with hatred!"

"When, unluckily, on reaching Basingwood, where it slopes towards Deasmill, they caught sight at a distance of two females, who at sight of them attempted concealment. This excited attention; and the poor girls were too eagerly followed not to be detected; when, alas! on coming up with them, the Squire had the double mortification of discovering in the fugitives his daughter and his niece."

"But why mortification?" demanded Mordaunt. "Is it so great a crime for two young girls to enjoy a summer walk in the woods, this sultry weather?"

"You forget that all intercourse between the cousins had been rigorously interdicted. Profiting by her uncle's absence with the

Basinghill Protectionists, it seems Emma had contrived to appoint a meeting with his daughter."

"For which I alone am accountable," interposed Reresby. "Before she quitted London, I exacted of Emma Cromer a promise that she would see my poor dear Magdalen, and explain to her those engagements towards my father which prevented my communicating with her by letter."

Mordaunt heaved a profound sigh. It was far from the first time he had repented having dealt so peremptorily and precipitately with his son.

"On detecting his daughter's act of disobedience," resumed Mrs. Mordaunt, "terrible was Mr. Cromer's explosion of wrath towards her! He was with difficulty restrained from some act of violence; but with his niece he dealt mercilessly—*mercilessly!*—actually daring to apply to this dear inoffensive girl, in presence of half-a-dozen strangers, terms the most opprobrious in the language—terms that should never reach a woman's ears; taxing her not alone with clandestine meetings with *you*, Reresby, at old Mr. Clemson's, under circumstances the most disgraceful—"

It was now Mordaunt's turn to glance anxiously towards his son.

"But with having connived with you—I really hardly know," continued Mrs. Mordaunt, shuddering and turning pale, "how to continue this story. But it appears that this wrong-headed, wrong-hearted man has gathered what *he* considers circumstantial evidence, that the child so cruelly put out of the way at Deasmill, some weeks ago, was the victim of Emma!"

"Monstrous!" indignantly exclaimed Mordaunt and his son, at one and the same moment.

"But surely," continued the elder, "*surely* the former part of Cromer's accusations extorted from his daughter some sort of explanation?"

"As soon as his violence would allow her to be heard. But for some time there was no getting him to listen to her declaration that it was *herself*, and not her cousin, who had met you at Clemson's; that the mourning dress of a similar form, worn by both, must have misled his informant; which was the more likely, as the Squire's daughter was known never to set foot in Deasmill, or, indeed, to quit the grounds of Cromer Hall."

"And when he heard this honest avowal?"

"He either disbelieved, or affected to disbelieve it; pretending that, in a fit of Quixotism, or hoping to disarm him, Magdalen was taking her cousin's delinquencies upon herself. So far from abating a word of his accusations, irritated by what he called his daughter's insolent interference, he proceeded sneeringly to declare that if ever again he detected her in communication with the wretched girl who had disgraced his family name, he would himself instigate such further investigations of the Deasmill business at the quarter sessions, as would drive out of the country both her

and the fine folks who held their head as high at Deasmarsh, as though they had never been chapmen and dealers elsewhere."

"Unfortunate man!" was the temperate rejoinder of Mordaunt. "If he only knew that over his own homestead the sword of justice hangs suspended by a single hair!"

"And Emma?" demanded Reresby, addressing his mother with anxious solicitude; "Emma, whom I know to be everything that is generous and spirited, how did she find courage to sustain this insolent calumny?"

"She found it in the firmness with which her cousin, regardless of her father's wrath, regardless of the presence of so many witnesses, persisted in denouncing *herself* as the guilty person—guilty of the Deasmill meetings—guilty of having broken her father's interdictions. With respect to the murdered child, she said (and *then* alone her voice faltered) it was a mystery still in the hands of God, who, in His own good time, would bring the guilty to justice. But she declared that, as she stood in His fearful presence, neither Emma nor herself had more concern in it than as regarded their abhorrence of the crime."

"Right!—good!—well felt, and well expressed!" cried Mordaunt, with an approving nod. "And what said the brute to her vindication?"

"Just what might have been expected of a man whose fevered brains were doubly excited by a fatiguing walk in harvest weather; swore that she was as bad as her cousin, and a disgrace to her family. Had not one of the persons present, a degree more decent or more sober than the rest, interfered for Miss Cromer's protection, she would have been ignominiously driven home by her father like a beast of burthen. But this man (the father of a family) afforded her his arm and protection back to the Hall."

"And to think that one cannot this very moment withdraw my poor Magdalen from the tyranny of such a monster!" cried Reresby, starting from his place.

"As to poor little Emma," continued Mrs. Mordaunt, "you will readily conceive in what a state of mind she reached the Rectory. On hearing only a thousandth part of what had occurred, her father rushed off to the Hall; and the interview between the brothers was, I fear, of a nature terrible to think of; for, in the course of an hour, Jacob was brought back, scarcely sensible, in his brother's carriage; and medical aid soon arrived, sent for express by the Squire."

"And they actually think him in danger?"

"Not in danger of *death*; but Dr. Palliser declares that his mind has received a shock the result of which cannot for some time be determined."

"So excellent, so inoffensive a creature to be sacrificed to the rampant cruelty of that ill-conditioned wretch!" exclaimed Matilda.

"What grieves me more than all," observed Mordaunt, with

glistening eyes, "is the share we have, if not innocently, certainly *unintentionally*, had in the business."

"Innocently—*innocently*—my dear father!" cried Matilda; "when did *you* ever commit a wilful wrong to any living soul?"

"I trust not. But, according to the common lot of sinful human nature, my dear child, I am not proof against the influence of my prejudices. Incited by *them*, I have, perhaps, suffered myself to remain blind, when clear-sightedness was a duty; and supine, when it became me to be active. I fear that, while still in hopes of breaking Reresby's engagement, I was guilty of slight and unkindness towards the uncle and cousin of Magdalen. I did not see my way clearly—I *would* not see my way clearly. Everything connected with the name of Cromer had become hateful to me!"

And by their silence and downcast looks, his wife and daughter seemed to admit that they "stood accountant for as great a fault."

"And now, my dear boy, let us hurry off to the Rectory, and ascertain what it is in our power to do towards aiding and comforting the friends we have treated so scurvily!" said Mordaunt, rising in haste.

Nor was there much avail in Mrs. Mordaunt's assurances that, having been sent for by Emma the moment after her father's return from the Hall, she had afforded the poor girl all the kindness and assistance of which she stood in need.

"I slept there that night," added Mrs. Mordaunt; "and it was from the dear girl's own lips I extracted all I have related. Conceiving herself to be under a promise of secrecy to Reresby, there were still some reserves; and the letter I forwarded to my son by the train, this afternoon, contained, I suspect, an entreaty to be released from her pledges; and a prayer that Magdalen might be vindicated without loss of time by the most ample explanations."

"And I can tell you, Master Reresby," added Mordaunt, "that to have kept your secret under such temptations demonstrates an almost Spartan courage, an almost Spanish sense of honour! True-hearted little Emma! When I think of all the good feeling she has made proof of, I feel in some danger of becoming faithless to my daughter-in-law."

"We had not been ten minutes returned from the Rectory," resumed Mrs. Mordaunt, "when you so unexpectedly made your appearance just now. I left the invalid dozing; and Emma, though anxious, composed. Believe me, Mordaunt, you had better not disturb them to-night! Besides, you have not dined. Wait, at all events, till you have had some dinner."

But even dinner, that most eloquent of special pleaders, failed to convince the travellers that, however weary or hungry, they had a right to postpone, by a single moment, the expression of their sympathy.

Off they started across the park, instinctively following the path towards the East Lodge suggested by Mrs. Mordaunt on the day

when their earnest colloquy close to Deasmill had convinced spy Drewe, who bore the tale straight to his employer, that the two fathers were plotting together the surest mode of enabling the two delinquents, whose honour was so dear to them, to evade the detection of justice.

CHAPTER XXV.

O my dear father!—Restoration! hang
Thy med'cine on my lips; and let this kiss
Repair thy violent harms.—SHAKSPEARE.

HAD the widow of the late celebrated Sir Nicholas Barton witnessed the greeting between the Honourable Member for Castle Dangan and her niece, she would doubtless have decided that Mr. Mordaunt's errand at Deaswold Rectory could only be to solicit her hand for his son: more especially as the worthy cotton-spinner addressed her as his "dear child," and could hardly refrain from tears, on seeing the alteration which a few days of intense misery had wrought in her appearance. For if the Mordaunts had bitterly reviled themselves for the diminution of their neighbourly attentions to Jacob Cromer, what were the self-upbraidings of his daughter! When she saw him brought home speechless, with only sufficient consciousness remaining to press her hand while she assisted to place him in the bed from which perchance he never more might rise, she fell upon her knees beside it, and prayed for forgiveness; *not* of her father, the father who knew not how to take offence; but that Father who is in heaven, and in whose hand vengeance abides! For how careless had she become of late of *him* whose care for *her* was unceasing! How much had she suffered her interest for other people to interfere with her filial love! How composedly had she borne being parted from him! Yet *he*, the moment he heard of an injury wrought against his child, had suffered such anguish that the very fountain-head of his life was stirred! He was dying of the mere agony of hearing her traduced!

All the tenderness lavished by that good father on her happy childhood now came back upon her mind; all the instruction patiently imparted, all the indulgence accorded to her girlish faults, all the partial measure of their household comforts assigned exclusively to herself! His frequent and fond recurrence to the memory of her mother, untimely taken from him, by which he had endeavoured to train her up to excellence and soften her heart towards himself, brought reminiscences of the time when, during her repining after Reresby (the momentary idol of her girlhood's fancy) he had redoubled his almost womanlike thoughtfulness for her comfort. Without hesitation, he had torn himself from his duties and fireside, to alienate her heart from its folly!

And what had she given him in return for all this? Divided

affection, lukewarm duty, an unobservant eye, an unthankful heart! She had dared to treat the man who was so good, nay so *great*, in the nature of his functions, the fervour of his faith, the simplicity of his mind and blamelessness in the sight of God and man, as an object secondary to herself!

No wonder that, in spite of the assuaging kindness of Mrs. Mordaunt and Matilda, the poor girl's pillow had remained sleepless since her father's melancholy seizure; or rather, that her pillow she had never seen—for she still kept watch by his bedside with the zeal of the most devoted of nurses. For, though apparently unconscious, he recognized her. Something of a smile brightened his sunken face whenever she bent over him; and once or twice, when incoherent words or a faint whisper escaped his lips, and his medical attendants drew near to interpret what they hoped might be the expression of a wish or suggestion of a remedy, his solicitude invariably related to "Emma." He was afraid his poor little daughter would over-fatigue herself by her attendance.

One comfort indeed she had experienced, greater than even the friendly sympathy of Deasmarsh. The moment it transpired in the village that the Rector was dangerously ill, the reaction of popular justice suddenly placed him before his parishioners in the light in which he formerly stood—as the most active, humane, and benignant of parish priests. Those who had stood firm in their reverence towards one who not only taught them all that was best and holiest, but practised what he preached, hurried off to the Rectory to inquire, condole, and tender their aid. But even such as had been led away by partizanship to the Squire into an over-credulous belief of his brother's unworthiness, if they did not already recant, stood aloof and shamefaced, while all around them vied in proclaiming the charities and good neighbourhood of the friend they were about to lose.

"There may be two minds," said Farmer Richards, the oracle of the blacksmith's shop, (who, since the repeal of the Corn Laws, had abstained from touching his hat to his landlord), "there may perhaps be two minds about the good this parish has gained from the stir and fever and commotioning of having a man of capital settle down amongst us. But there ben't but *one*—or there oughtn't to be but *one*—about the loss we should have in changing our good, steady, God-fearing parson, who was born and has lived among us and feels for us all as if one of ourselves, against e'er another in the land of Squire Cromer's providing."

At present, however, if Dr. Palliser's opinion were to be relied on, the Squire's nomination was not likely to be in request. The sick man had rallied. His senses were comparatively restored; and no objection being made by the medical attendants to Mordaunt's earnest desire for a sight of the sufferer, he was admitted to the bedside. A feeble cry, that burst as from the heart of poor

Jacob when his really attached neighbour gave loose to his feelings of sympathy, denoted perfect consciousness of the presence of a friend. A moment afterwards, however, he resorted to his customary call for "Emma;" and, when he saw, as she pressed forward to answer him, the affectionate, the almost paternal manner in which she was supported by Mordaunt, a smile of joy irradiated his face. His daughter, his calumniated daughter, the daughter he was about to leave, would not be friendless when he was gone!

"All this is heart-breaking work, Reresby!" said Mordaunt to his son, when, after more than an hour's sojourn at the Rectory, they took their way leisurely back across the park, in the delicious stillness of a July night—the dews fragrant around them, and the evening star trembling over them, as though at finding itself alone in that vast firmament. "I would fain have had the epoch of your marriage unclouded by a single care! And, alas!

——' sorrows come not single spies,
But in battalions'—

If we lose this good man, Reresby, never, *never* shall I forgive myself!"

"We shall *not* lose him, my dear father. Palliser promises us that he will do well!" cried the young man. "Providence will spare him to the prayers of so many by whom he is valued. His constitution has undergone a sad shock; but his health was previously robust."

"No—I thought poor Jacob ailing when he was down here nearly a month ago."

"Out of spirits, not out of *health*!"

"At all events, you will admit that his illness is a sad kill-joy!"

"And I am the more grieved at it, from my unintentional share in his vexations. But (forgive me, father) the thought uppermost in my mind on returning to Deaswold is and *must* be Magdalen. Magdalen has suffered nearly as much as her uncle."

"Too true, alas!—for, as the time approaches for my explanation with John Cromer, I shrink from the task, as from coming in contact with a reptile!"

"If in the first instance you were to write to him?"—"Still interviews must follow!"—"At all events, surely it would be better to break the ice by a letter, asking for the hand of his daughter. That prospect might perhaps reduce the wild beast to a milder mood, and prepare him to receive you with decency."

"But I have first other explanations to insist upon. I must have justice rendered to Emma and her father!" said Mordaunt, in a tone almost reproving—so much of egotism did he perceive in Reresby's evident conviction that the world might be swallowed up by an earthquake, provided Magdalen were safe!

"But, if you visit him early to-morrow morning, as you pro-

pose," argued his son, "you will find him still surrounded by the people drawn hither by the Basinghill meeting: more especially that pestilent attorney—"

"Never mind the pestilent attorney!" said his father, as at that moment they reached his own hall door, cheerful with its sun-like lamps and prompt attendance.—"*Fiat justitia*, Reresby!—And now, let us sup and to bed; that we may be astir early to-morrow, in order to contend with these manifold vexations."

Early astir he was! and before the dew was off the grass had visited the Rectory to satisfy himself that the doctor's prediction of an easier night had been verified. "The sick man was still asleep,"—No better answer could have been given. Milnward, too, had made his appearance, obedient to the summons despatched to him; and it was good to know that the office of the poor Rector was thus satisfactorily supplied.

Mordaunt was a little vexed that, even on his return from the Rectory, nor son nor daughter was present to meet him at the breakfast-table. For, how was he to guess that Matilda and her brother had sat up a couple of hours after the rest of the family retired to rest, discussing the prospects of both? With the utmost patience did Miss Mordaunt listen to her brother's somewhat lengthy account of himself;—the momentary liking for Emma which had preceded his heartfelt attachment to her cousin,—and the momentary liking for Lady Belvedere, which might perchance have rendered him faithless to Magdalen, had not the Rector and his daughter so opportunely made their appearance in London to re-deaswoldize his heart. When he described how Emma's account of her cou-in's distress of mind, her gentle submission and devoted affection, to say nothing of her intelligence, loveliness, goodness, and truth, had revived in his bosom its partially effaced impressions, his sister could not but admire, not alone his own frankness in the avowal, but the self-denying generosity of his informant.

But, if Matilda proved a patient auditress, she expected to be listened to in her turn, when it *came* to her turn to relate the story of her own true love. As yet she had not breathed a word to either of her parents of Sir Herbert Glynn's offer of his hand. But it was not exactly necessary for Reresby to wait the event of Jacob Cromer's convalescence, to be informed of the probability of his having to love as a brother-in-law the man so long treasured as his friend.

"Glyune?—Herbert Glynn?—Herbert in love with *you*—and *you* in love with Herbert?" cried he.—"Impossible, impossible!—You want to ascertain what degree of elasticity my credulity has acquired from the recent surprises to which I have been exposed!—But *this* is a thing I *must* have found out, had it existed! You may as well attempt to persuade me that you have thoughts of becoming Mrs. Aristobulus Settringham!"

"Thank you, my dear Reresby, for the standard of comparison

you assign to Sir Herbert!—But time will show that nothing is more true—”

“Than that you rejected George Melfont and the coronet hovering over his head for the sake of my friend Glynne?”

“And that my refusal of papa’s proposal to take a house in town for my coming out, during the year you were both in the East, had precisely the same origin.”

“There’s a girl for you!” cried Reresby, extending his hand and giving his sister’s a hearty shake. “And yet, Matty, there would have been more philosophy in what I always imagined your motive for declining a season in town, *i. e.*, your dislike of having to choose between living among great people who looked down upon you, and little people on whom you looked down.”

“It was from my heart I derived my counsel, not my head.”

“And with this mutual attachment (which Glynne writes, and *you* declare, to have existed ever since the days when you used to play at catscradle together in holiday time at Burtsmill) you were both so intensely stupid as not to come to an understanding on the subject, when he was staying here last year?”

“Even so, my dear brother!—But we were both sand-blind with jealousy.”

“Blockheads!—*He*, of course, of that lump of aristocratic clay, George Melfont,—or rather of Melfont Park and its beautiful avenues,—the glory of the shire!—But of whom on earth were *you* jealous, Matilda?—Not a spinster save yourself and the two *pois chiches* of old maids at Basinghill, within ten miles of Deaswold!”

“Emma Cromer is much obliged to you!”

“*Emma* again?—you were actually jealous of poor little Emma?—*You*, Miss Mordaunt, of Deasmarsh, with thirty thousand pounds and a face and figure that might sit for the portrait of Calypso? Fie, fie upon you!”

“I deserve to be laughed at,—but I am not sure that I can bear it!”

“Confess at least that Emma’s fate is somewhat extraordinary! By nature the most harmless and insignificant of God’s creatures, she has not only been subject to infamous imputations from which the worst turpitude would recoil, but an object of jealousy, at one and the same moment, to yourself and Lady Belvedere! It would not much surprise me to hear next that Ibrahim Pasha had bid a few millions of piastres for her, to carry her off to the land of crocodiles; where, by the bye, she might run against George Melfont botanizing in the Delta; and, after exciting the envy of a whole harem, become an English Viscountess at last!”

“What will Magdalen say, my dear brother, if you talk so much about Emma?”

“If she be wise, that is a proof how very much more I *think* about Magdalen.”

"And what am *I* to say to your talking so little about *Matty*?—I *had* hoped that the prospect of brotherhood with your friend would have been more welcome!"

"If I could only look upon it as among the possibilities of things!—but were you to tell me that my father had asked to be knighted,—or that Pillicock of Pillicock Hill, old Cromer, had subscribed to the Cobden testimonial,—I would believe it sooner than that, in this world of contradiction and contrariety, two people so perfectly assorted to each other as you and Glynne were likely to come together in wedlock!"

"How is such an infidel to be convinced? At least, promise me that, when I break the matter to my father, you will support our cause."

"It will need no supporting, *Matty*! What better could your family desire for you than to become the wife of a man possessing high principles, intelligence, character, competence of fortune, and distinction of birth?"

"They may desire nothing *better*, perhaps; but something *different*! Papa has set his heart upon establishing me within reach of Deasmarsh."

"At Melfont Park, of course. But that question you long ago negatived. And though my father may still desire the renewal of George's proposals, surely he has given abundant proof, within these last few days, that the strongest of his personal prejudices are secondary to the wishes of his children? After his consenting to *my* union with the daughter of the Squire, no fear of his opposing *yours* with my friend Glynne,—the only thing wanting to perfect my own happiness! Think what pleasant times we shall have of it, *Matty*! When you are tired of visiting us at Deasmarsh, we shall go over and see you in Ireland. Glynne has a famous salmon-leap at his Castle Rackrent,—the very thing for the Easter holidays!"

Matilda could hardly refrain from a smile at the mercurial nature of his projects.

"And in time," continued he, setting her raillery at defiance, "poor old Burtisill will come to be included in our round of visits. For Tom, be it known to you, lady fair! has done the duty of a younger brother, by taking the fair Claudia off my hands; and my father has such unlimited influence over her uncle, that I have little fear of the old gentleman's consent to their marriage."

"And I promise you, dear Reresby, that, however unacceptable to you as a wife, you will like her of all things as a sister-in-law! You never saw a more good-humoured, amiable, grateful little girl."

"And even if less than perfection, I am bound to approve of her as Mrs. Thomas Mordaunt, considering how unwilling she has shown herself to let her fair hand and her hundreds of thousand pounds go out of the family! And I should have been loth to see

the last of Burtsmill, Matty ;—Burtsmill, where we were born and bred ;—Burtsmill, which not only made us, but made us *happy* ! The old factory will always be as dear to *me* as the Castle of Hapsburg to the House of Austria !”

Engaged in such pleasant reminiscences and glowing anticipations, no wonder that the minutes slipped by, till the small hours of the night almost grew again into the signal for work-a-day duties. On the whole, however, Mordaunt was not sorry to enjoy his breakfast tête-à-tête with his wife—that wise and sober-minded partner of his useful existence, whose early frugality had done so much towards securing the prosperity they were now enabled to turn to such good account. It was a consolation to talk with *her* over their children ! And to *her* he did not scruple to avow that the cup of sweets which Reresby found so palatable, had for *him* a grievous flavour of hyssop. As the time approached, indeed, for him to proceed to Cromer Hall, he extended his hand to her in silence, as though requiring the support of the being dearest to him on earth, at a moment so trying.

On rising from the breakfast-table, he was glad to find that obstacles still retarded his departure. An absence of some days from home had caused a world of business to accrue upon his hands—justice business, farming business, parish business, complaints of the injured, claims of the poor, and appeals to the Briarean power of the Man of Capital.

But, after an hour spent in his justice-room in conferring with the courtiers in smock-frocks, and cabinet ministers with account-books in their hands, who waited anxiously at his levee, his mind felt all the better prepared for his task. Business was to the active-minded Mordaunt like contact with his mother earth to Antæus. If ever, for a moment, he felt proud, it was when surrounded by humble petitioners, who appealed to him with all the greater security of sympathy and aid, from knowing him to have been once as themselves.

With a renovated mind, accordingly, he took staff in hand, to cut across the park by Deasmill towards Cromer Hall—an inauspicious road, but the shortest by a mile ; and he had no mind to loiter by the way. As long as his foot was on his own land his thoughts remained absorbed by the complex interest of his errand. But, no sooner than, after crossing the green lane, he entered the grounds of the Lord of the Manor,—his adversary, his foe, his antagonist in courts of law as in the decencies of private life,—the sensation so new to him of being a trespasser, took possession of him body and soul. There was something so bewildering in suddenly traversing a path, within sight of Deasmarsch, whereof all the country round was familiar to him as his glove, yet where all was nevertheless strange and new,—that for a moment he felt dizzied by the altered aspect of distant objects, viewed in a light in which he saw them for the first time. The

spire of Deaswold Church seemed to have changed its place ; and when, from a higher level of the hill, he beheld the smoke and flame of a locomotive skimming like a flying dragon the valley below, he seemed to become suddenly aware of the proximity of the railroad, which to Deasmarsh was invisible ; and of the change his intervention had wrought in the aspect of the country. While panting up that steep and naked hill, he could *almost* understand the envious grudge cherished by Cromer Hall against the pleasant shadiness of Deasmarsh.

The Squire was "at home." Unprepared for such an astounding event as Mordaunt's visit, the bumpkin who answered the hall-bell ushered the stranger into the cheerless study which afforded as curious a contrast to the Deasmarsh library as the arid hill-side to the green slopes of its park ; and having received his card, proceeded in search of "master."

"No man having the least claim to the character of an English gentleman would insult another under his own roof," had been Mordaunt's reflection, as he crossed the enemy's threshold ; and he was justified in his belief that a visit so frankly proffered could not be absolutely refused, by the speedy appearance of Mr. Cromer. Not, however, unaccompanied. The Squire was followed by a duck-legged, scrubby little man, who, though not formally introduced to the visitor, took a seat near him, with so much the air of one who came prepared to be a professional witness of whatever might occur in the interview, that Mordaunt had no hesitation in setting him down as the "pestilential attorney."

The Squire, indeed, was still so completely under the influence of amazement at Mordaunt's arrival, that he had not collected the scattered forces of his mind to meet the enemy. He was *almost* civil ! He almost forgot that the stranger within his gates was the detested Man of Capital, and *he* the shrunken, defeated, humiliated Lord of the Manor—the crestfallen master of Cromer Hall !

CHAPTER XXVI.

'Tis thus the spirit of a single mind
Makes that of multitudes take one direction ;
As roll the waters to the breathing wind,
Or roams the herd beneath the bull's protection.

BYRON.

"I have the pleasure of acquainting you, Mr. Cromer, that the news from the Rectory this morning is highly satisfactory," said Mordaunt, unwilling to break at once into the matter of his visit. "The patient passed a good night. When I called there at nine o'clock, he was still asleep."

Not an inch did the Squire relax from the rigid perpendicularity of his spare figure at this intimation.

"You must be aware, sir," said he—reply of some sort being inevitable—"that Mr. Jacob Cromer and myself are not on terms to make his health a matter of much interest in this house."

A rejoinder concerning the indissoluble tie of fraternal relationship rose to the lips of Mordaunt. But he forbore. His errand was one of conciliation.

"You are, I fear, surprised at my intrusion into a house where I have little reason to suppose myself a welcome guest," he resumed, after a moment's pause. "But finding, sir, that in matters of some moment, in which your family and my own are equally concerned, you have been misled by false representations, and have acted under erroneous impressions—"

The little duck-legged attorney moved restlessly in his chair.

"I have considered it my duty, both as a father and a magistrate—I wish I could add as a neighbour—to wait upon you, in order to place the case fairly before you, and leave it to your own candour to make such admissions of misconception as you may think proper."

"My opinions on the subject in question were grounded upon facts known to the whole county, sir; and on all occasions I express them unflinchingly, as it becomes an honest man to do," said the Squire, who was gradually overcoming his panic of surprise, and recollecting that he was face to face with Mordaunt of Deasmarsh. "If anybody, gentle or simple, be disposed to call me to account for them—here I am!"

"No one is accountable for having been led into error," replied Mordaunt, unresentingly. "It is only those who, after being enlightened, *persist* in asserting what they know to be untrue, who are bound to answer for their words!"

"Later or sooner, I am quite ready to answer for mine!" persisted the Squire—who seemed to court an affront, with the view of justifying retaliation.

"The explanations I am desirous meanwhile of making to you, Mr. Cromer, and in the most friendly spirit, are of so confidential a nature," resumed Mordaunt, glancing towards the anonymous auditor, "that—"

"That gentleman, sir," interrupted the Squire, "is not only my friend, but my man of business. Whatever you may have to say to me would be so immediately communicated to him, that it is better he should hear it at once from yourself."

"In that case," resumed Mordaunt, "though for both our sakes I had rather our interview were private, I must waive all further delicacy. I understand, sir, you have been informed, and have publicly repeated, that between your niece Emma and my son there exists a connection unacknowledged to their parents, and discreditable to both."

"I have asserted—because I know it from eye-witnesses to be true—that they were in the habit of meeting daily, last year, in

the deserted millworks adjoining Clemson's cottage," rejoined the Squire, with an air of surly determination. "And I say again, that if one of my labourers were found with a parish girl under the same circumstances, I would not give much for her character."

It was so urgent to prevent the Squire from committing himself by further violence on the subject, that Mordaunt hastened to the point.

"I conceive that nothing in my conduct since I have been a resident in this neighbourhood entitles you, Mr. Cromer, to doubt my word," said he; "and I now give it to you, as a Christian and a gentleman, that your niece never, on any one single occasion, met my son at Deasmill. They had, in fact, no temptation to such a rendezvous, being at ample liberty to meet wherever they thought proper, beginning with their own houses."

A bitter and almost audible sneer (timidly emulated by the professional witness) was all the reply vouchsafed.

"So much in vindication of one of the best and most modest girls in the kingdom!" resumed Mordaunt, with spirit. "But, as regards my son, so far from attempting to defend *his* conduct, I freely admit that he *was* in the habit of frequenting Clemson's premises, for the purpose of meeting one whom it was impossible for him to see elsewhere, and who was probably mistaken for the young lady so unjustly accused."

"No doubt a substitute has by this time been provided," retorted the Squire, with a scornful toss of the head. "Some wretched girl, willing to take upon herself, for certain considerations, the misdemeanours of Miss Emma Cromer."

"You would scarcely say so, sir, did you surmise the situation in life and irreproachable character of her to whom I allude," remonstrated Mordaunt; "a young lady belonging to one of the first families in the neighbourhood," added he, trusting to let gradual light into the mind of the Squire, and prevent too sudden a shock.

"There is but one young lady, saving your own daughter and mine, living within ten miles of Deaswold," cried the Squire, "and *that* is Miss Emma Cromer."

"And if," persisted Mordaunt, "the alternative you have suggested—if nearer to yourself than your niece—my son had found an object to whom his whole heart is devoted, and to whom he would fain devote every moment of his future life—"

The Squire sat as one paralyzed. He scarcely seemed to breathe. He did not even attempt to speak.

"Would he be altogether hopeless," continued his agitated visitor, "of obtaining your consent to his marriage with your daughter, to whom, with the full consent of his family, he is desirous to offer his hand?"

Still not a word escaped the firm-set lips of Cromer.

"Mr. Mordaunt, sir," interposed the attorney, obsequiously

addressing his client, who appeared stupefied, "purposes to you to terminate all further 'ostilities between the families in the 'and-somest manner, by a match betwixt Miss Magdalen and his son and heir."

"Magdalen!—Magdalen Cromer meet a man unknown to her family at Clemson's mill? A daughter of mine go skulking to underhand appointments with a young fellow not allowed to set foot across her father's threshold?" burst at length, as by the opening of a sluice-gate, from the long-compressed lips of the panting Squire. "I don't believe it!—I won't believe it! 'Tis an accursed and mischievous lie! Women are bad enough—I scarce know the one that's to be depended on—but that girl, who has neither seen nor known the shadow of harm—that girl who sits composedly from morning till night, looking her mother and me full in the face, could never, *never* be guilty of conduct such as would shame even people I could name, every drop of blood in whose veins is puddle!"

By a generous effort, Mordaunt subdued the impulses of irascibility to which this angry outburst gave rise; trusting that, after a first explosion, the father's wrath would subside.

"That I admit my son's full share of culpability in this untowardly affair, Mr. Cromer," said he, "is proved by my frank offer of all the reparation in my power. These young people have been imprudent; be it the better part of their parents to pardon them and make them happy."

"Your son—your son!" cried Cromer, who had thrown aside all pretence at self-control, "what is your son to *me*? Who cares what becomes of a son of yours? Do with him what you will, marry him to whom you please, and let him and his wife go to the devil! but, as regards my daughter, sir—my daughter, Magdalen Cromer—whose forefathers have been estated esquires bearing arms in this county for the last four hundred years, I would have you to know that, sooner than see her take up with a low-born manufacturer—a man whose grandfather was a parish apprentice—I'd see her lying in the grave!"

A cold shiver thrilled through the frame of Mordaunt. Still he forbore. The happiness of Reresby was at stake.

"But if your daughter's peace of mind and fair fame be endangered by your opposition to her attachment," pleaded he—"if the attention you have yourself drawn upon the unfortunate Deasmill affair—"

A new light seemed suddenly to startle the mind of the Squire. Darting from his seat, and throwing open the study-door, he called aloud for his daughter, in a voice that echoed shrilly up the old-fashioned square staircase opening from the hall to the roof.

"Let Miss Cromer know I wish to speak to her—*immediately!*" cried he to the bumpkin who, his name being "Tummas," chose to answer to that of "Magdalen." During which short colloquy

the attorney found time to sidle up to Mordaunt, with a suggestion that, as "the Squire's blood was up, maybe it might be better to adjourn the discussion till some more easy moment."

"Now or never, sir!" was the firm reply. For Mordaunt had by this time seen enough of the delicacy of Mr. Cromer's deportment, to feel that it would not do to abandon a timid and defenceless girl to the rough visitings of his rage. A moment afterwards, Tummas put his head awkwardly into the room. His young lady was with "Missus."—"Missus's compliments, and Miss Magdalen warn't well enough to come down."

"We will see *that*!" cried her father, stalking out of the room, ere Mordaunt had time to remonstrate with his intention of forcing his daughter to so painful an interview. And before he had half done expressing to the duck-legged little gentleman his trust that the proposal for her hand, which contemplated only her happiness, might not be made a pretext for mortifying and distressing her, the door was again violently thrown open, and Cromer reappeared, dragging in by the arm a beautiful, trembling, ashy-pale girl, who, but for the powerful grasp with which he upheld her, would have sunk at once to the ground.

"Sit there—if you fancy yourself too weak to stand!" cried he in a hoarse voice, flinging rather than placing her in a chair. "Nay, no whimpering!" he continued, forcing away the hands she had clasped over her face—though her eyes remained as tearless as her lips speechless; "but look me steadily in the face, Magdalen Cromer, while you answer, as you will at the day of judgment, whether, forgetting what is due to yourself and your parents, you have ever given a meeting at Deasmill, or elsewhere, to young Mordaunt of Deasmarsh?"

Poor Magdalen, who had sunk back in the high-backed chair into which she had been flung, sat with her eyes fixed despairingly upon her father, as if prepared for implicit obedience. But her powers of speech were palsied.

"Answer me, child!" reiterated her father, again gripping her arm—"answer me at once! Do not expose me to the shame of hearing you falsely accused by these Deasmarsh people, without affording me right and title to tell them that they lie in their throats!"

"Mr. Cromer!" shouted Mordaunt, starting from his place. But in a moment the attorney crept between his patron and the exasperated guest, as if to prevent a hostile collision.

"Enable me," continued the unappeased Squire, "to tell the person before us that his son is as contemptible in *your* eyes as in mine—that you neither know nor want to know him—and that, sooner than become his wife, you would marry Vickers there; or, no matter whom—the greatest scamp in the county! Speak, Madge! Have you suddenly become an idiot? Are you or are you *not* acquainted with Mr. Mordaunt's son?"—"I am, sir."

"And you have met him at Deasmill?" Magdalen attempted to speak. But her lips quivered without articulating a syllable.

"You *have*! I see it in your confounded face!" cried Cromer, clenching his fist. But as he advanced menacingly towards her, Magdalen flung herself out of her chair at his feet—embracing his knees—perhaps to excite his pity—perhaps to secure herself from his rage.

"There must be an end of this, sir," said Mordaunt firmly, interposing. "If you are capable of exercising unmanly violence against this feeble girl, I will not stand by to witness it."

And while he endeavoured to raise Miss Cromer from the ground and replace her on a seat, Vickers exerted himself to represent, aside to his client, the danger of exposing to the enemy so much of his family history.

"And what part of my family history has he not contrived to make his own?" cried the Squire aloud, disdaining all attempts at concealment. "What part of my property has he not contrived to injure? He came from his blackguard factory, a stranger into this parish (where, for ages and ages, my family had been as kings in the land), and trampled upon me with his upstart pretensions at consequence. My life has been made a burthen to me through his settlement in the parish; and when my head is laid in the grave the Deaswold I leave behind will be no more like the Deaswold in which I was born, than though it were foreign ground. All this is his doing—all, his *accursed* doing! Not content with which, he must needs plant his foot on my own hearthstone, and prove to me that my daughter is a wanton!"

So far from listening to this outrageous apostrophe, Mordaunt was exerting himself to soothe with fatherly kindness the trembling young woman, whose distress of mind was relieved by a burst of tears, on finding herself so tenderly entreated by the father of Reresby.

"But this I beg him to understand," continued the Squire, still talking of Mordaunt as though he were not present, "that I would as soon have my blood mix with that of the hangman, as with that of a Manchester cotton-spinner; and that, if Magdalen Cromer do but exchange another word with his puppy of a son, out of **my** doors she goes—at once, and for ever!"—

"And thank God she is no longer ignorant," added Mordaunt with spirit, folding her hand kindly within his own, "that, for the future, mine are open to receive her! As the wife of my son, fondly will she be cherished at Deasmarsh!"

"Then let her choose between us at once!" cried the Squire, suffocated with rage. "If she *wants* to leave her father's house, let her go, and be damned! Nobody wishes to detain her."

While poor Magdalen was uplifting her clasped hands entreatingly towards her father for pity and forbearance, her brother Stephen suddenly made his appearance. Having caught the sound

of the Squire's voice at its highest pitch of frenzy, as he entered the hall-door and learned from Tummas that Mr. Mordaunt was the guest by whom it was provoked, he probably judged the occasion a good one to conciliate his father by playing the bully in his behalf.

"What is all this row about, sir?" cried he, startled at finding his sister included in the group. "I trust, father, no one has been wanting in respect to you or Madge?"

"It is your sister herself who is wanting in respect to me!" said the Squire, quieted, as a wild beast is sometimes quieted, by contact with its cub. "Will you believe it, Stephen? After all we have heard of that infamous affair at Deasmill, (for which, as Vickers was saying only last night, some one might yet swing), the jade whom Ralph Drewe watched so often into hiding was no other than yonder sweet-spoken young lady; before whom, forsooth, your mother has often chidden me for alluding to so indelicate a subject!"

"But you do not, I hope, sir, pretend to connect the interviews between Miss Cromer and my son with the dreadful crime accidentally associated with the scene of their meeting?" cried Mordaunt, with just indignation.

"I *do* connect the poor urchin found in the Deas with the young libertine of whom you choose to talk as though he were Prince of Wales!" retorted the Squire; "and for more reasons than one. How came it, pray, (as I was saying t'other day at Basinghill to my friend Settringham,) how came it that the girl Hakewill, whom Hilshere the turnpikeman positively swore at the inquest he had seen skulking at nightfall towards the spot where the body was found, having in her hand a bundle tied in a handkerchief the colour and pattern of the piece found round the neck of the child, how came she, I say, to disappear out of the village of Deaswold, with her mother and sister;—after repeated visits to Deasmarsh,—*after repeated visits, I say, Mr. Mordaunt, to Deasmarsh;*—where she boasted of having been closeted for hours with the father of Mr. Reresby Mordaunt?"

"Where's the good of dwelling on the subject, sir?" cried his son, sullenly, interrupting him. "The thing is past and over. Let the hare sit! At present, what we have to look to is, that there are two persons present here whose company is less welcome than their room."

"Before I relieve you, young sir, from that of *one* of those to whom you allude," said Mordaunt, assuming the stern severity of a judge, "let me request you to remove your sister from hence. What further must pass between us is unfitted for her gentle ear."

On which hint, Magdalen herself, without waiting for her brother's interference, rose feebly from her place, as if about to leave the room.

"Not a step, at your peril!" cried her father, interposing betwixt

her and the door. "Those who behave as you have done, Magdalen Cromer, can bear to hear what they do not scruple to act. People who are squeamish only in their ears, deserve little consideration!—Sit down!"

"As you please, sir!" said Mordaunt, also, though unbidden, resuming his seat; his tranquil nature almost overpowered by these unseemly discords. "My scruples were for *your* sake rather than *mine*. But I must request of you to issue orders to your *son* as well as your daughter not to quit the room!" continued he, on discerning by a glance that the heir-apparent of Cromer Hall was preparing to make off. "I should be sorry to attack a man, however guilty, behind his back."

On which apostrophe, the Squire motioned his son peremptorily back to his place, with the gesture of one accustomed to find his authority absolute.

"You have charged me, Mr. Cromer," continued Mordaunt, in a firmer voice, "with having held secret communication, at my own house, with a family of the name of Hakewill; whose sudden and mysterious disappearance from Deaswold, during your brother's absence in London, has been the origin of the more curiosity and comment, that, in the various examinations and inquiries arising out of the finding of a dead infant in the Deas, within the bounds of my estate, these people were pointed out as objects of suspicion."

"Ay!" interrupted the Squire, finding no better words at command than to reiterate verbatim his charge. "You won't deny, I suppose, though you took care not to send the case to the Quarter Sessions, that Hilshere the turnpikeman saw the girl Alice skulking at nightfall towards the spot where the dead body was picked out of the mud; bearing a bundle wrapped in a handkerchief of the colour of the rag found round the neck of the strangled child!"

"Exactly. Such, and even stronger, was the presumptive evidence of her guilt. Your accusation against me consequently includes no less a charge than having wilfully defeated the ends of justice, by compounding for the worst of felonies,—for manslaughter,—for *murder*!"

"I am glad to find, sir, you understand the full drift of my meaning," said the Squire, with an insulting nod.

"And you naturally inquire," said Mordaunt, resuming the thread of his argument, "what, having my eyes open, has induced me to do this? I will tell you, sir,—tell you, at the risk of transferring to your own heart the heavy burthen you would fain fix upon mine. Because, Mr. Cromer, having visited, as an act of humanity, the cottage of these wretched Hakewills, I obtained from them, not as a magistrate but a benefactor, a full confession of the circumstances connecting them with that fatal discovery—"

Again Stephen Cromer attempted to sneak from the room. But it was now Mordaunt's turn to bid him remain.

"If you wish to entitle yourself to mercy, young man," said he,

"bear your part in an explanation which may save you from more fatal exposure!"

"By what right, sir, do you pretend to give orders to my son?" cried the Squire, involuntarily resuming his bullying tone on perceiving the cowed air of Stephen.

"By the right of an upright man over a guilty one!" was the stern rejoinder. "The handkerchief to which you have so often referred, Mr. Cromer, as attaching suspicion to the sister of poor Mary Hakewill, and which others in the parish depose to having seen in the laundry at Cromer Hall, was in truth the property of your son."

"*Yours?*" cried the Squire, turning towards the young man, from whose face every particle of colour had now disappeared.

"Nay! The child itself, Mr. Cromer, was his offspring; and if *his* were not also the crime of infanticide, it was by his advice, by his *orders*, that the body of the infant (which I verily believe to have died from natural causes, the convulsions of infancy aggravated by ignorance and neglect) was deposited in the river with a stone round its neck, in order to evade the inquiries and suspicions likely to arise from its being presented for burial in consecrated ground."

"Is this *true*, sir?" demanded Cromer, turning to his son. And the dead silence that pervaded the room conveyed only too full an affirmation.

"There was no help for it!" muttered Stephen, raising his arm as though to ward off his father, who rushed upon him, evidently with the intention of felling him to the earth. "What was I to do with the child? What was I to do with the girl? I had not a shilling of money! I asked you for some, father, the very day the child died, and you thrust me out of the room with a curse!"

"But you can swear to me, before God," exclaimed the Squire (to do justice to whom be it said that the exposure of his own brutality weighed nothing against his present uncertainty whether the hands of his son were stained with blood-guiltiness,) "you can swear to me, Stephen, that the brat was *not* put out of the way,—that it died naturally and fairly?"

"May I drop dead this moment before you, father, if its mother and I didn't fret over its death as though born in honest wedlock!" cried he. "You were right, sir," continued he, turning, in the excitement of the moment, to Mordaunt for support. "It died of convulsions the day after its birth."

"Then, no matter what was done to the corpse!" exclaimed Cromer, breathing more freely.

"Such was so far my own impression, sir," resumed Mordaunt, "that, on finding the mere concealment of the birth, if proved, would condemn the unfortunate young mother to long imprisonment and hard labour, I took occasion, before it transpired that suspicion had fallen on the wrong sister, and before the real delin.

quent became exposed to examination, to facilitate the departure from the country of a most unfortunate family."

A few muttered imprecations addressed by the Squire to his hopeful son alone broke the painful silence that ensued. Miss Cromer, with her hands crossed over her bosom, seemed endeavouring to overcome her emotions; while the attorney was probably cogitating how this alarming complication of incidents could be converted into a job.

"You will now perhaps further inquire, sir," resumed Mordaunt, gravely addressing the master of the house, "what interest induced me to interfere in behalf of strangers, at a considerable cost, and with grievous risk to myself were my interposition only slightly misrepresented, as it was when you yourself saw fit to attribute my conduct to motives the most nefarious."

"Any one would have done the same to whom such strong evidence had been afforded."

"By one of the day-labourers on your estate! It is not on such a source *I* should be tempted to rely, in matters involving the credit of one of my country neighbours and the honour of my niece!" rejoined Mordaunt. "Nay, even when the guilt of your son was clearly demonstrated to me by the sight of his own letters and the confession of his accomplice, my desire that so foul a blot might not rest upon a gentleman of honourable station belonging to this parish,—above all, to the brother of one in whom, for some months past, I have trusted I beheld my future daughter-in-law,—that, consulting no one, and little suspecting how cruelly the infamy might be made to recoil upon my own family, I took such measures as effectually stifled further inquiry."

Under an impression that the absence of any accusing party secured him from legal prosecution, Stephen Cromer now began to exhibit symptoms of returning audacity. "He should be glad to know," he said, "by what right Mr. Mordaunt pretended to meddle with his concerns? He should be glad to know what authority he had for all he had been advancing?"

"Do not suppose that I have acted without retaining in my hands the documents necessary to my justification!" said Mordaunt. "When necessary, I will exhibit them to your father and his man of business. And now, sir," continued he, turning towards the elder Cromer, "I again reiterate my request that the remainder of our interview may be confidential."

"No, by God!" exclaimed the Squire, the turmoil of whose mind seemed only to exacerbate his enmity. "Say on and say out! Enjoy to the utmost your triumph. Set your foot upon my neck, and grin for joy while I grovel in the dust. But *these* shall share my mortification. *These* shall hear me tell you to your face, again and again, and till the last moment, that whatever may have been the boyish follies of my son, never will I consent to see a child of mine engrafted on your miserable stock!"

"Then let me beg you to peruse *this*," said Mordaunt, taking from a pocket-book he had previously drawn from his inner pocket, a letter over which the Squire hastily cast his eyes, as not at first comprehending his drift.

"Robert Cromer," said he, as if reciting aloud the signature, "and dated 'Peter Hall, Cambridge?' This is the writing of my son Bob—who has not set foot in Northamptonshire these five months! Are you going to implicate *him* in the confounded business at Deasmill?"

"Not in the *Deasmill* business. By taking the trouble of reading your son's letter, Mr. Cromer, you will find it contain acknowledgments addressed to a stranger, for assistance—*pecuniary* assistance, rendered him at a time when, having been refused it by his father, he was in distress that must have ended with expulsion from the University. Having been tempted, inadvertently let us *hope*,—rashly, *certainly*,—to use without sanction the name of a young friend in a money transaction, he was on the point of being taken up for embezzlement, or (why not use the right name?) for *forgery*, when, by the timely intervention of a young man who, knowing the respectability of his connections and the grief such an event would cause to the worthy Rector of this parish, enabled him by restitution of the money to hush up the affair."

"I had heard some slight hint of the business, sir," said Stephen, in reply to the haggard looks of inquiry fixed upon him by his father. "I know that Bob had taken some imprudent step last March, when distressed for eight hundred pounds to pay a billiard-marker, from whom he had borrowed the money on a promissory note. But I did not know that Tom Mordaunt was the person who got him out of the scrape."

"Yes, Mr. Cromer, my youngest son!" added Mordaunt, firmly; "by whom so large a sum could not have been commanded without my seconding. The letter in your hand is one of acknowledgment for the advance."

"You shall be paid the amount before I am four-and-twenty hours older!" gasped the Squire. "Had I known a child of mine was your debtor in so much as the value of a farthing, I would sooner have gone without food and clothing!"

"It was not with a view to payment, sir, I placed that letter in your hand," said Mordaunt: even Vickers—even the little duck-legged attorney—feeling ashamed of the ungraciousness which prompted the Squire to regard only in a pecuniary light an obligation which had probably preserved his son from transportation. "What I wish is to prove to you that, while you have been heaping injuries on my head, I and mine have, from first to last, desired to live on friendly terms with so near a neighbour,—the lord of a manor wherein is embarked so large a portion of my property and personal comfort. I came into this county, Mr.

Cromer, eager to lay aside the labours of life and their prodigious profit, for the sake of leading a quiet life in the bosom of my family, and witnessing the fructification of my toils in the happiness of those around me and the benefit of the community. But from the very day of my arrival, sir, you strewed flints in my way, and encompassed my dwelling with a hedge of thorns! *Why*, I know not, except from envy of the superior riches obtained by means to which a man born with *your* independence would not have deigned to stoop. Every past injury, however, I am willing to overlook and efface from my memory, as though it never had been, provided you give me in return what will be prized in my family as the greatest of treasures,—the daughter who looks as though she longed to throw herself at your feet, and ask your forgiveness and blessing.”

“Keep off! No *cant*—no *hypocrisy*!” cried the Squire, in a hoarse voice, motioning away the poor girl, who, bathed in tears, was preparing to make the supplication suggested. “If she choose to marry your son,” continued he, turning towards Mordaunt, “let her. Take her, sir,—take her at once. I am fallen too low to feel much pain from a humiliation the more. As to her fortune—”

“I want no fortune,” cried Mordaunt, snatching into his arms the lovely and inoffensive being who, spurned by her unnatural family, seemed scarcely able to support herself. “Whatever portion you intended for her can be given to the young man at Cambridge, whose imprudence has involved him, I fear, in a complication of misfortunes.”

“If my uncle should drop, however,” observed Stephen, as if anticipating the death of the Rector as a piece of good fortune, “Bob will come into a living of a good fourteen hundred a year!”

“Heaven preserve this parish from so great a calamity as the loss of my friend Jacob!” fervently exclaimed Mr. Mordaunt, who did not appear to reckon a tendency to forgery high among canonical virtues. “May he live to witness a general peace-making among us! May he live to see this neighbourhood established on a footing of friendliness and peace!”

“If you allude to this house, sir, and those whom it contains,” growled the Squire, “in *my* opinion it matters little what becomes of us all! My sons are disgraced for ever!”

“Pardon me! Nothing has transpired, or need transpire, of the circumstances which have come to our knowledge, beyond the bounds of this chamber.”

“If not disgraced in the eyes of the world, at least in their own eyes and mine! My daughter will soon belong to those whom I thank for what they have done for my family, but whom the command of the Queen herself should never make me take by the hand. My brother and his daughter have enlisted with the

enemy,—my own flesh and blood have revolted; and had I my wish and will, I would see Cromer Hall burned to the ground, and never set foot in Northamptonshire again!"

"At present you are under the influence, Mr. Cromer, of strong and painful impressions. Time will soften them!" said Mordaunt, rising to take leave. "That you have granted, however reluctantly, your consent to your daughter's union with my son Reresby, will thoroughly obliterate all those I have received during this trying interview. Should you wish to see me again, I am at your service; or Mr. Vickers can wait upon me as your representative. But that I fear you would very speedily repent having sanctioned such a measure, and that it might give rise to injurious comments," added he, again affectionately taking into his own the hands of the drooping Magdalen, "I would profit by your permission, and carry away this young lady with me at once, to those who are labouring under the utmost impatience to welcome her to their heart. But I have an intermediary measure to propose; to which no one, I should imagine, would object. Her poor little cousin is sadly in want of aid and comfort. A visit to Deaswold Rectory, till you are more disposed to view her conduct with indulgence, would afford a satisfactory alternative for all parties."

"Where she pleases, and as soon as she pleases! I care not if I never see her face again!" said the angry man. And when Mr. Mordaunt, after a salutation that included all present in its courtesy, hastened out of the room, poor Magdalen followed him, unnoticed by those who instantly gathered into a group to discuss the astounding revelations of the last hour, to falter out a few words of grateful acknowledgment.

"The devotion of my whole life will be insufficient to repay such generous kindness!" was her murmured farewell.

"In an hour, my dear child, my carriage shall be here to convey you to the Rectory," were the parting words of her new father.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The multitude of angels with a shout
 (Loud as from numbers without number, sweet
 As from blest voices) uttering joy, Heaven rung
 With jubilee and loud hosannas filled
 The eternal regions.—MILTON.

THE unexpected arrival of Magdalen at the Rectory,—an explanation of the origin of which was not immediately necessary,—was naturally ascribed by her uncle and cousin to her desire of affording comfort in the house of sickness. "This is *your* doing, dear, good Mr. Mordaunt!" cried Emma, on seeing her step out of the Deasmarsh carriage; while the invalid, discerning in her presence by his bedside proofs of relenting on the part of the Squire,

trusted that, since his brother's interdiction of all communication between the girls was taken off, the rest would soon follow. At no great distance of time the Squire would doubtless make his appearance at the Rectory to attest the complete vindication of his innocent niece. The moment this notion took possession of his mind, his convalescence outstripped even the sanguine prognostications of his doctor. A less warm-hearted man than Jacob might, in fact, have been gratified by the interest his illness had excited among his neighbours; and when he saw the whole Mordaunt family collected around him, and his own little smiling girl was the first to point out to him that her cousin was hanging upon Reresby's arm, and to ask whether he would not contrive to get well very soon, that *he* might perform the marriage ceremony for them instead of Mr. Milnward, he felt satisfied, from the light in her laughing eyes, that he had completely misconceived her sentiments, and that his uneasiness on her account had been gratuitous. It was something, to be sure, to have had his error shared by a woman so skilled in the tactics of her sex, as the widow of the late celebrated Sir Nicholas Barton! But when his daughter proceeded to assure him that in London she had been Reresby's confidant, admitted into the secret of his love for Magdalen when even his own sister was untrusted, he could not help wondering how he had ever fancied anything so preposterous as that Emma—his own Emma—could have given away her heart without *his* previous sanction of her choice!

On recovering sufficiently to find his way downstairs again, and feast his eyes once more through the lattice of jessamines and musk-rose upon his fragrant lawn, where he found the Deasmarsh party increased by the arrival of Sir Herbert Glynne, and noticed that, whenever family matters were discussed among the elders of the party, the young baronet and Matilda found it pleasanter to instal themselves out of doors in the rustic seat under his favourite plane-tree, where they were only slightly discernible from the house, he *did* perhaps think it a little strange that his own little linnet should remain the only mateless bird! But how fortunate for *him*! Had Emma taken to flight among the other couples, what would have become of his deserted nest?

After the lapse of a few days, indeed, it became necessary for Reresby to return to town for the discharge of his parliamentary duties; the struggle of parties being just then of so much too vigorous a nature to admit of the good cause being fought by proxy, that, both in town and country, the honourable member for Castle Dangan was forced to submit to be unpaired.

No time was lost in the interval of his absence, however, in forwarding his marriage. And when Ghrimes, of Northampton, waited upon Mr. Cromer with a sketch of the marriage settlements which were to assign to his portionless daughter a jointure of four thousand a-year, the sharp-eared solicitor managed to extract from

the ejaculations of the irritable man intelligence promising to his employers all that was wanting to complete their satisfaction.

The vexation of mind arising from the repeal of the Corn Laws, aggravated by the annoyance of seeing Mordecai the Jew not only sitting in the king's gate, but sitting there after having nobly re-deemed his own two worthless sons from the utmost rigour of the law, had determined the surly owner of Cromer Hall to quit the country.

"Between ourselves, Mr. Ghrimes," said the duck-legged attorney, sidling in a conciliatory manner up to his grander *confrère*, on finding that it was become a more lucrative line of policy to promote peace than foment discord between the parties—"Deasmill 'as become a sad eyesore to the Cromers! The young Squire, as you probably know, 'as compromised with his father for a 'ansom allowance, and is off to America after the 'akewills;—fearing, I suspect, that, in spite of your employer's noble exertions, the child-murder business might again be brought for'ard at some future time, by persons 'ostilely disposed."

"He is right. As long as any of those implicated remain on the spot, they must always be in jeopardy," replied Ghrimes.

"And as regards the Squire," added Vickers, depressing the corners of his mouth, "'is 'ealth and 'appiness being completely broke up, he 'as taken a sort of 'atred to the neighb'r'ood."

"And no wonder," rejoined the Northampton solicitor, aware that he could not better serve his patron than by encouraging the distaste. "To such an extent, that he was saying to me, yesterday," added Vickers, "that if he could only get a satisfactory tenant for the 'all, he'd let the place at once, and go and settle at Bath; a place to which he took a great fancy when the young ladies was dying at Clifton!"

A satisfactory tenant was not long in finding; nay, was already found. The only objection raised by Mr. Mordaunt to his daughter's marriage with Sir Herbert Glynn was the dread of her settling in one of the most disturbed districts of Ireland; and the occasion that now presented itself for the Man of Capital to establish her within reach of her family was too tempting not to be instantly closed with.

Before Stephen Cromer quitted the country, he joined with his father in signing a lease for twenty-one years of the staring old mansion, and a hundred and fifty acres adjoining; which accommodated the Squire and his lady with the power of removing their spider-legged old chairs and tables, as well as their frightful old family pictures, and a van-load of pickles and preserves, to the house in Marlborough Buildings, where they were to wrangle with each other over their weekly bills and the misconduct of their family, for the peevish remnant of their days.

One of the most gratifying moments of Mr. Mordaunt's life was that when, on taking possession of the premises, he gave

carte blanche to his daughter for the complete refurnishing of the house.

"I need not tell you, Matty," said he, "to make the Ha'l as little like as may be to what it was in other times. Your own good taste would have suggested *that*, even if I had not been anxious that Magdalen should forget she had ever any home in these parts but Deasmarsh. But let nothing remind either ourselves or any one else of the Cromers. Henceforward, may this parish become as one family—one happy social knot! We shall be able to effect twice as much for the good of our poorer neighbours by acting in concert; whereas, so long as John Cromer was on the spot, expend what sums of money I might for the benefit of the population, I was sure to find tares springing up among the wheat I was sowing."

If Matilda replied to this address as though she had not been listening *very* attentively, there was some excuse for her. She was planning in her own mind how the "parlour" they were standing in could be converted into a dining-room, so as to admit of her morning room being made to open into the study, about to be converted into the library of Sir Herbert Glynne.

The only member of the happy circle on whose brow a tinge of sadness still lingered, was Magdalen—Magdalen, who, with every desire to preserve a dutiful reverence towards her parents, could not but perceive that they were quitting the country in which they had so long abided without leaving a regret behind.

But in the eyes of her new kindred the pensive gravity of her countenance served only to enhance its charm. Till now they had only seen her at church, or in the fields, muffled in her bonnet and cloak; and the distinguished grace of her finely-turned head and beautiful form so completely surprised them, that even the sober-minded cotton-spinner was soon heard echoing the declaration of his son, that she was the loveliest creature upon earth! Under any circumstances, the Mordaunts must have found her pretty and pleasing; but the forlorn helplessness of her situation, and the melancholy which their utmost endeavours failed to disperse, rendered her so interesting a hostage in their hands, that they scarcely knew how to make enough of her. The father, mother, and sister of Reresby, vied with each other in exertions to make her forget that for his sake she had become an orphan.

She, who had lived as a pariah in the home of her childhood, suddenly found herself an object of worship. From the heads of the family down to Don and Donna, every living thing at Deasmarsh was at her feet.

"You will bear in mind, my dear, that I have *two* daughters going to be married!" was Mordaunt's generous instruction to his wife, when the wedding-clothes were to be ordered; "whatever may be wanted for Matty, is wanted for Madge."

"It is lucky for *me*, perhaps," said the gentle girl to her cousin,

one evening when a dinner engagement of the Deasmarsh family at Settringham Abbey left them alone at the Rectory ; “ lucky for *me*, perhaps, dear Emma, that I have the drawback of Reresby’s absence, and my father and mother’s cruel estrangement, to prevent my poor head being completely turned. Such kindness, such consideration, nay, such real affection ! How am I ever to repay these dear friends the indulgence they have shown ? ”

Emma, indeed, thought they must be *almost* repaid by the delight taken by the grateful Magdalen in all and every thing at Deasmarsh ; a spot which, to her cramped experience of the pleasures of modern luxury, was fairy-land. Such multitudes of new books to read—of new flowers to wonder at—of new comforts to enjoy—seemed to her humble heart an almost too lavish adornment of a world of probation.

The good Rector, meanwhile, was nearly as much pleased at witnessing the generous joy with which Emma entered into the brilliant prospects of her cousin, as though they awaited herself. He was doing his best to get well, that he might officiate in the double solemnization which, immediately on the close of the session, was to drive the parish of Deaswold out of its senses. For Mordaunt was to bestow marriage portions and new-built cottages on six young girls, to be united with six of the most deserving labourers on his estate ; and the festivities about to celebrate the wedding of his heir—the heir of his well-earned fortune—were planned upon a scale likely to make the good old county shake its sides for glee.

The party assembled for the celebration was not to be a brilliant one, lest the absence of Magdalen’s parents should provoke painful observations ; but it was to be a *merry* one. The tenants were to be feasted. The poor were to be fed. It was to be an event on which the parish of Deaswold was likely to dwell with gratitude for years and years to come.

Considering the frightful oath by which Squire Cromer had bound himself never again to cross the threshold of the Rectory, poor Jacob could not much regret his self-banishment from a spot where, as brothers, their unchristian alienation afforded so pernicious an example ; more especially, after learning in sad confidence from Mordaunt what it was necessary should be explained to him, the criminality of the future representatives of the family. But he heard the mortifying tale, and beheld the departure of the Squire and his wife, with a spirit humbled to the dust. In the opinion of Dr. Palliser, the emotions excited by these family events afforded the only obstacle to his immediate recovery.

Emma, however, with her loving eyes and consolatory spirit, was always at hand to place before her father (as *he* had placed before herself in former moments of despondency) the blessings which so far exceeded the troubles of his lot, the affection and respect that waited upon him, and the means of usefulness placed in his hands.

As she sat beside his easy chair, reading or talking to him, or making his tea, while the sweetness of the summer evening breathed pleasantly from his garden into the cozy room, it was impossible, indeed, not to agree with her that he had much to be thankful for. At least, so thought young Milnward, who was established at the Rectory, fulfilling the duties of an active curate; his gentlemanly manners and active zeal having already so recommended him to the Deasmarsh circle, that Mordaunt, the fountain-head of good suggestions, could not forbear inquiring, through Ghymes, of the duck-legged attorney, whether the Squire was to be tempted (the conduct at college of his son Robert having disqualified him for taking orders) to dispose of the next presentation of the family living.

It would not be *quite* impossible, he thought, to perfect the happiness of the Rectory, by permanently attaching to its fireside the good spirit of the house; in the first instance, as the happy bride of her father's curate, and eventually, as the wife of his successor.

"The sole obstacle I perceive to the match, my dear little coz," whispered Reresby, who already assumed a kinsman's privilege with his kind friend and flame of former days, " (for I will not think so ill of you as to fancy you can long persist in indifference towards a good-looking, good-hearted, right-minded young fellow like Milnward, who loves you like the light of his eyes)—the sole obstacle I perceive is, that you would never prevail upon the widow of the 'late celebrated' to honour the ceremony with her presence! Her little ladyship made so many apologies to me for being sister-in-law to a rectory, that she would die outright on finding herself aunt to a curacy; and one cannot afford to part with so rich a treat!"

At this suggestion, Emma primmed up her pretty mouth; but whether resenting the attack on Lady Barton, or the hint that Edward Milnward might become in time as acceptable to the daughter as the father, remains to be proved.

"Let them alone, my dear fellow, let the loving couple alone!" cried Sir Herbert to his brother-in-law. "Canaries never finish their nests, if people watch them while building! You are a terrible mar-match, Reresby! If you had not made poor Lady Bel. and Dick Lovell the talk of the town, by pointing out their courtship to Cad Rowlandson, who had nothing better to do than carry the report in the course of the morning to seven clubs and nine morning visits, besides entertaining a dinner-party at Lady Madrepore's curiosity shop, it might have come to a marriage at last; when we might have enjoyed the fun of seeing Mark Trevor amplify himself into a double-bodied shadow, like the frog in the fable."

"Or like a two-volumed back-gammon-board in one piece!"

"Whereas, having been congratulated into breaking off the flirtation, the fair countess is talking of wintering in Athens; the only capital in Europe where she has not yet made herself talked of, and *très bien porté* just now, for ladies addicted to Aspasia-ism."

"Don't attribute her Philhellenics to *me!*" cried Reresby. "The *real* motive of her dismissing Lord Richard was her disgust at finding what *very* domestic life was the fashion of the day! Somebody assured Lady Bel. that the Fauconbergs had been seen in the Isle of Wight, honeymooning in a fly and pair; and she refused Lovell before the day was over!"

"No matter! Practise on her fanciful ladyship whatever hoaxes you think proper; but Emma is too good a creature to be trifled with!"

In spite, however, of this prohibition, no sooner had the solemnization of the sacred rite, to which all parties had been looking forward with such interest, produced a Mrs. Mordaunt the more in the world, in place of the Miss Mordaunt who ceased to exist, than Reresby contrived to whisper to his father that, during the bridal tour of his children, he must do his utmost to forward the wooing at the Rectory.

Mordaunt's heart was too full to answer. Two carriages and four, adorned with favours, were waiting to convey the two happy couples to the railroad; and besides the emotion arising from bestowing his parting benediction on Matilda and Magdalen, he had just returned arm in arm with his excellent wife from the monster tent erected on his lawn, where the toast of "Long life and prosperity to the worthy family of Mordaunt!" was being echoed by shouts of applause, such as had never before rent the air in the parish of Deaswold.

The bells rang, the bonfires blazed, the cottages were adorned with garlands of flowers, and the village was planted on either side the way with rows of young fir-trees from the plantations. From the Darley Station, where the flag was flying as for a royal birth-day, pealed a battery erected by the zeal of those connected with the railway; while Clemson and his wife stood bowing and bobbing in wedding garments provided by the generosity of the heir of Deaswold; whose happy marriage they evidently regarded as, in a great measure, their handiwork.

When, in process of time, the formal account of the solemnity of the day, contained in the "Northampton Independent," was confirmed at Basinghill by the testimony of Farmer Richards and half a dozen other worthies, who had witnessed the roasting of the oxen and distribution of the strong beer, the Miss Moulseys and his Excellency Aristobulus were forced to admit that, if neither lords nor ladies graced the ceremony,—neither the lord lieutenant nor the county members, nor their neighbours from Settringham Abbey, nor even Sir John and Lady Mary double-G.,—the poor had ample cause to remember the day, and bless the enlightened mind and beneficent spirit of the second providence of Deaswold—the self-created gentleman and MAN OF CAPITAL.

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